

Dr M: In democracy, losers must yield gracefully
The Malaysian Insider
August 18, 2011
By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 18 — As political parties ramp up preparation for the 13th general elections, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad threw in a reminder that an effective democratic government can exist only if the losers accept their fate.

In his latest blog post (chedet.cc/blog/) put up yesterday, the former prime minister drew attention to the series of uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, saying that real democracy came with limits and in order for democracy to work properly, the people must accept there will be winners and losers.

"It is important that everyone should accept losing. If not, the winners would find themselves unable to govern the country as the losers would undermine the stability of the country which is required for a government to function," the country's prime minister for 22 years said.

Dr Mahathir said the overthrowing of governments was not the end of uprisings, as seen in the Arab world, because the real reason for uprisings was to set up a new and better government that will take care of its people.

"In the end it is up to the people whether they want a good government or not. Democracy will give them a choice but democracy requires an understanding of its limitations. If this is understood and the rights are not abused, then democracy will give a good Government," he said.

Dr Mahathir stressed that democracy required a majority to form the next government, which meant there could not be an endless number of political parties.

The retired politician said that the best deal to ensure that everyone's interests were protected was to agree to set up a single party that can cater to all, but if this was not suitable, to set up a coalition.

He stressed that such a grouping must be agreed to before an election can take place so there can be a majority to form the next government, which is different from one formed after the elections.

Dr Mahathir termed post-election coalitions "a coalition of convenience".

He said this was not ideal because the group "will always be held to ransom" and the defection of some members would result in that government toppling.

"Clearly a post-election coalition results in the tail wagging the dog," the former Umno statesman said.

Dr Mahathir's party, Umno, is the lynchpin in the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN), a coalition of 13 smaller parties covering Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak that was formed in 1973 as the successor to the three-party Alliance pact that took control of government at the onset of Independence in 1957.

Election 2008, however, has seen changes to the power play in the country.

A new political pact consisting of PKR, DAP and PAS emerged to challenge the BN's hold on power, while within BN, the balance appears to have shifted greatly into the hands of Umno.

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