

**We are better than Singapore, 'so-so' Asean neighbours and US, says Dr M  
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 6 — While Malaysia is not perfect, it is still a better place to live in than Singapore where “15 per cent of the population are treated as second-class citizens”, or the United States where there is much inequality or other “so-so” Asean neighbours, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today in an apparent bid to revive the country’s nationalist past to shore up support for Barisan Nasional (BN).

Dr Mahathir’s (picture) remarks echoed BN attacks against activists for stomping on photographs of Umno leaders on the eve of National Day last week, amid a surge of discontent the ruling coalition has blamed on instigation by Pakatan Rakyat (PR) parties.

“We are 55-years old. This blessed multi-racial country of ours has been free for 55 years. For some Malaysians of 55 years and under, to be free of foreign rule is no big deal. Of course we are free, so what?”

“Jalur Gemilang! Just a rag — a strip of coloured cloth. It can be of any colour. What’s so great about the stripes, the star and the moon. Why must we be loyal to a piece of coloured cloth?” the former prime minister said in remarks published on his blog today.

Dr Mahathir said he would always cherish independence because as a Malaysian he would not have to call foreigners “master or tuan”.

“In America there is much inequality with 1% being extremely rich and 99% poor according to Nobel Laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz... And in ASEAN. Singapore has done well. But the people seem unhappy. 15% of the population are treated as second-class citizens. They are poor. The other countries are so so.

“Am I stupid? But really there is nowhere else I would like to be other than Malaysia. It’s not a perfect country. I don’t like some of the things I see or experience. But on balance there is more good in independent Malaysia than there are bad things.”

There has been a bigger push for more political and economic reforms in recent years since BN lost its two-thirds parliamentary majority in Election 2008.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has also been forced to dismantle draconian emergency-era laws and introduce economic reforms as he prepares to call his first general election as prime minister.

Malaysia is also facing a massive brain-drain, with some of the country’s best and brightest moving to live and work in countries like Singapore in ever growing numbers.

While Dr Mahathir acknowledged the imperfections of the current government, which has been controlled since independence by coalitions led by his Umno party, he said there was still more good than bad in Malaysia.

“I was expelled from my party. I was ostracised. When I retired I was treated like an enemy of the government.

"Others were detained without trial. A few claimed they were tortured. Maybe they were. But that is not the policy of our governments. The law does not permit that though there are more advanced countries where torture is legalised."

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