

Dr Mahathir regrets Internet freedom
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By Md Izwan

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad admitted today he might have made a mistake in giving guarantees for Internet freedom, which has been blamed for empowering and enabling opposition parties to win more seats in the 13th general election.

The former prime minister said if he had the opportunity to do so again he would reconsider his decision to grant absolute freedom for the Internet when setting up the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in 1996.

"When I headed the MSC, I was asked by an American woman whether we would block the Internet.

"I told her no, we will be very free... but now I will think twice about it," Dr Mahathir said at the closing of the CEO Forum 2013 at the Berjaya Times Square in Kuala Lumpur today.

Dr Mahathir said he did not expect the decision to cause such drastic changes that it can be misused by irresponsible parties and the public making provocative statements against each other.

"When given the freedom, we thought nothing much will change but once you give them freedom, they will usually abuse it.

"Now you see the public provoking each other, such statements have made us to distance from each other," he added.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has previously promised not to block the Internet, and instead try to approach the people using social media.

He also said the government would not licence news portals or blogs as done by its southern neighbour Singapore, but would enforce existing laws to ensure national harmony.

Social media such as Facebook and Twitter microblogging network have been acknowledged as among the reasons for the "Arab Spring" in Egypt where the people had demanded their then president Hosni Mubarak to resign.

It is estimated that 29 per cent of Facebook account holders in Malaysia are aged between 25 and 34 years old.

Political analysts say Malaysians use the Internet to get information, prompting politicians to use Facebook and Twitter to reach out to voters rather than using the mainstream media which has seen shrinking newspaper circulation and dwindling television viewership over the years. - June 18, 2013.

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