

Dr M: Islam has no stable, democratic country today
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 25 — No stable and democratic nations exist in today's Islamic world, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said, observing the political turmoil in the Middle East post-Arab Spring which he also extended to Malaysia, where religion appears to have become a tool for leverage.

The former prime minister cautioned that democratic principles will never take root until the warring political parties are able to concede there will always be a losing side in an election and respect the electoral outcome.

"In the Islamic world now there is no stable country that is ruled by democracy. So long as there is no willingness to accept defeat in elections democracy will never succeed in the Islamic world," the 88-year-old wrote in his latest blog entry today.

Mahathir, Malaysia's longest-serving prime minister, wrote that he had been called to comment on the turbulent situation playing out in Arab nations in the aftermath of decades of dictatorships in a recent television interview, though he was loathe to weigh in on the troubles affecting other countries.

He observed the Arab nations had never been under democratic rule, having experienced only authoritarianism through monarchies, or an absolute ruler; and so were having trouble grasping the implications of a democratic electoral system.

"The willingness to accept defeat in an election is important if democracy is to be a success. This is seen in progressive and democratic countries. The loser accepts defeat and accepts his position as the opposition party. They wait for the next elections to contest. They might succeed, they might not. But the election results are respected," he wrote.

To achieve the best results, the ideal would be for the political parties to form two blocs, Dr Mahathir said, and held up Malaysia as an example.

The country's fourth prime minister who retired from office in 2003 observed that the two-party system that exists today was the indirect outcome of the founding of Semangat 46, a splinter party of Umno that is now defunct.

According to Dr Mahathir, Semangat 46 leaders managed to cobble together an opposition coalition and started the system of pitting only one candidate in a constituency against the government's contestant, in the elections; creating the preferred political situation in which the party that gained the most seats forms the government.

“Democracy is not an easy way to practise. There are many more conditions to fulfil before democracy succeeds. The main condition is the administrative institution that exists must accept the rule of the winning party,” he said.

He added that civil service obedience to the government of the day also applies to the police and the military.

“Power struggles by the armed forces for whatever reason causes a country to not only become undemocratic but also unstable. Military rule will become autocratic rule. The people will still suffer,” he said.

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