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KUCHING: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has cautioned Malaysians not to be easily influenced by foreign powers by calling for a change in government policies because these foreign elements could have hidden agendas.

In this modern era where patriotism might easily be questioned when one starts questioning government decisions, the former prime minister lamented that foreign powers had the tendency to meddle with government affairs by playing up issues, such as those involving human rights.

Their intentions, he said, were often not to highlight the plight of the people but to home in on the government's weaknesses in taking care of its own people, which would eventually lead to calls for a change in government.

"In the old days, the people did not question all government decisions.

The understanding today is that the people have the right to question all government policies.

"This is considered good if the people are questioning policies for the benefit of the country. However, one must be careful with the influences for them to question government policies as these people might have been used by foreign powers who are more interested in destabilising the country," said Dr Mahathir when officiating at the closing ceremony of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) 'National Patriotism and Politic Convention: The Real Direction' here yesterday.

Also present at the function, which was held at the university's DeTAR Putra theatre, Samarahan campus, were Chief Minister Pehin Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, Unimas vice chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Khairuddin Abdul Hamid, Unimas Board of Directors

chairman Datu Dr Hatta Solhi and convention project director Muhamad Ikram Jalil.

Reminding the people not to fall under the influence of these foreign elements and blindly accept their ideologies, Dr Mahathir said they should be smart in understanding the real situations and be loyal to the country. He stressed that Malaysia was still a conservative country, and do not accept new ideologies easily. Admitting that certain ideologies are good, he warned that some might be too good for the people's understanding, and thus might be misused.

"Those fighting for these ideologies sometimes are influenced by foreign life's values, and this is when patriotism becomes an issue."

However, he remained confident that Malaysians were smarter than people from most countries in practising their

democratic rights.

Dr Mahathir said the country's principle of democracy was based on local values and understanding.

"In a democracy, we can either win or lose. Those who lost have to accept the fact that they have lost, and would have to wait for another election in their effort to replace the current government.

"They can use the time to continue highlighting the weaknesses of the current government but at the same time they to accept the fact that they are not well received by the people. This is democracy.

"Our democratic system makes it possible for anybody to form the government as long as they have the support of the people. But we must ensure that the losing camp does not bring problems that could destabilise the nation."