

PARLIAMENT - DEBATE

DEBATE ON THE ESTIMATES FOR THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS AMOUNTING TO \$165,834,510.

KUALA LUMPUR, JAN. 28 (BERNAMA) 1969

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THE ALLIANCE MEMBER FOR KOTA STAR SELATAN, DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMED, CALLED ON THE GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE THAT THERE WAS NO MONOPOLY BY ANY PARTICULAR NEWS PAPER GROUP IN THE COUNTRY.

HE SAID THAT IT WAS NOT THE GOVERNMENT WHICH WAS CURBING THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS, BUT NEWSPAPERS WHICH HAD A MONOPOLY.

HE CALLED ON THE GOVERNMENT TO REASSURE THE PEOPLE THAT THE LAWS CONCERNING PUBLICATIONS WERE MEANT TO PERPETUATE A FREE PRESS RATHER THAN TO SUPPRESS IT.

HE SAID THAT UNLESS THE GOVERNMENT TOOK FIRM STEPS, FREEDOM OF THE PRESS WOULD BECOME MEANINGLESS. - BERNAMA MORE.

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HE SAID: +ONE OF THE THINGS THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN CRITICISED FOR HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE FACT THE NEWSPAPERS HAVE TO HAVE A PERMIT TO PUBLISH.

+THOSE WHO CRITICISE THE GOVERNMENT FOR THIS CONDITION MAKE IT APPEAR AS IF THE EXISTENCE OF LAWS CONTROLLING PUBLICATIONS IS A DENIAL OF THE UNIVERSAL RIGHT OF FREE EXPRESSION AND A FREE PRESS IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY.

+THIS A FALSE PRESUMPTION. IT IS POSSIBLE NO DOUBT FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO USE THE LAW TO CURB A FREE PRESS BUT THE POWER TO CURB THE PRESS HAS NEVER BEEN MISUSED BY THE GOVERNMENT.

+IT HAS NEVER, FOR EXAMPLE, BEEN USED AS IT CAN BE USED, TO LIMIT FAIR CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT OR PARTY IN POWER.

+IF THERE HAS BEEN FEW CRITICISMS IN THE PRESS OF THE GOVERNMENT IT IS PERHAPS BECAUSE THERE ARE FEW THINGS THAT THE GOVERNMENT DOES THAT ARE GROSSLY WRONG.

+IT MAY ALSO BE BECAUSE EDITORS ARE LABOURING UNDER THE MISCONCEPTION THAT THEY MUST PRAISE THE GOVERNMENT AT ALL TIMES AND FOR ALL THINGS.

+WHENEVER THE GOVERNMENT INVOKES THE POWER TO CONTROL PUBLICATION IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN DUE TO PUBLIC INTEREST.

+WRITINGS CALCULATED TO INCITE COMMUNAL FEELINGS OR UNDERMINE THE PEACE AND SECURITY OF THE NATION ARE WHAT USUALLY MAKE THE GOVERNMENT RESORT TO THE WITHDRAWAL OF LICENCE.

+THE NUMBER OF TIMES THAT THIS HAS HAPPENED IS VERY FEW INDEED.

+LICENCING IS BUT ONE FACTOR THAT MAY LIMIT THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS. A MUCH GREATER THREAT TO THIS FREEDOM IS NEWSPAPER MONOPOLY. - BERNAMA MORE.

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DR. MAHATHIR ADDED: +IF THERE IS BUT ONE NEWSPAPER IN THIS COUNTRY, THEN NO MATTER HOW DEDICATED TO FREE SPEECH THE GOVERNMENT IS, THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED AND THE POLICY FOLLOWED CAN VERY WELL BE CONTROLLED BY ONE PERSON OR A SMALL GROUP OF PERSONS.

+IN EFFECT, THIS WOULD MEAN THAT THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IS DENIED TO THE CITIZENS, AND NEWSPAPERMEN WHO MAY DISAGREE WITH THIS ARE FEW.

+IN FACT, THERE WOULD NOT ONLY BE NO FREEDOM OF THE PRESS, BUT THERE COULD ACTUALLY BE THOUGHT CONTROL BY NEWSPAPER OWNERS WHO ARE NOT ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE.+

DR. MAHATHIR SAID THAT IN MALAYSIA, SUCH A SITUATION ACTUALLY PREVAILED IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRESS.

HE SAID THERE WAS ONE GROUP WHICH +PRACTICALLY CONTROLS ALL PUBLICATIONS IN ENGLISH.+ - BERNAMA MORE

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+IT IS IN FACT A DICTATOR OF PUBLIC OPINION AMONG THE ENGLISH READING PUBLIC,+ HE SAID.

DR. MAHATHIR ALLEGED THAT THIS GROUP DENIED OTHERS THE RIGHT TO EXPRESS OPINIONS THAT WERE CONTRARY TO ITS POLICIES.

HE DESCRIBED THE POLICIES OF THE GROUP AS +JOHN BULLISH+ AND SAID THE GROUP WAS +A LOCAL MANIFESTATION OF THE RIGHTWING BRITISH PRESS.+

TIME AND AGAIN, +SOME BRAVE SOULS+ HAD TRIED TO BREAK THE GROUP'S MONOPOLY, BUT TIME AGAIN THE ASSAULTS HAD FAILED, HE ADDED. - BERNAMA MORE

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DR. MAHATHIR SAID: +I BELIEVE IT IS THE GOVERNMENT T'S INTENTION TO ENCOURAGE FREE EXPRESSION OF OPINION THAT A FREE PRESS GUARANTEES.

+THE GOVERNMENT CANNOT GIVE UNLIMITED LICENCE WHICH CAN LEAD TO JOURNALISTIC ANARCHY.

+UNFORTUNATELY PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT, PEOPLE WHO ARE IN A POSITION TO AID A FREE PRESS, SEEM TO HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD THE REASON WHY THE GOVERNMENT HAS GIVEN ITSELF THE POWER TO CURB EXCESS IN THE PRESS.

+I REFER TO THE COMMERCIAL COMMUNITY.

+THIS COMMUNITY WIELDS A CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE OVER THE WELL-BEING OF ANY NEWSPAPER.

+IN FACT THEY CAN MAKE OR BREAK ANY NEWSPAPER MERELY BY TAKING OR REJECTING ADVERTISING SPACE.+

+DR. MAHATHIR SAID THAT ONE GROUP HOWEVER, APPEARED IMMUNE TO THE +BIG STICK+ WIELDED BY THE COMMERCIAL COMMUNITY.

+I AM TOLD BY THE PUBLISHERS OF ONE NEWSPAPER THAT NO LONGER IS, THAT THE PEOPLE IN THE VARIOUS COMMERCIAL HOUSES ARE UNWILLING TO ADVERTISE IN ANY NEWSPAPER OR MAGAZINE THAT IS CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT,+ HE ADDED.

+THEY THINK THAT IF THEY DO THIS, THE GOVERNMENT WILL NOT FAVOUR THEM, THAT THE GOVERNMENT MAY EVEN CAUSE THEIR FIRMS TO LOSE CONTRACTS AND SO ON. - BERNAMA MORE 1434

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+THIS TYPE OF THINKING IS AN INSULT TO THE GOVERNMENT AS I HAVE STATED BEFORE THAT I DO NOT THINK IT IS THE GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION TO SUPPRESS FREE SPEECH.

+MUCH LESS IS IT THE GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION OR MODUS OPERANDI TO TWIST THE ARM OF INDUSTRIALISTS MERELY BECAUSE IT WANTS TO SUPPRESS THE PRESS.+

DR. MAHATHIR SAID HIS INTENTION IN +FOCUSSING+ THE ATTENTION OF THE HOUSE ON THIS MATTER WAS PROMPTED BY A DESIRE NOT ONLY TO SEE A FREE PRESS IN THE COUNTRY, BUT ALSO A NEED +TO BREAK A MONOPOLY THAT IS DETRIMENTAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ACCEPTABLE CHARACTER FOR THIS NATION.+

+HE SAID: +THE GOVERNMENT MUST REASSURE THE PEOPLE THAT THE LAWS CONCERNING PUBLICATION OF NEWSPAPERS ARE MEANT TO PERPETUATE A FREE PRESS RATHER THAN TO SUPPRESS IT.

+THE GOVERNMENT MUST REASSURE AND INDEED ENCOURAGE THOSE WHO ARE IN A POSITION TO HELP A FREE PRESS, TO TRY AND SUSTAIN THE EFFORT OF THE FEW TO TRANSLATE A BELIEF INTO A FACT.+

HE ADDED: +UNLESS THE GOVERNMENT TAKES FIRM STEPS TO CLEAR THIS MISUNDERSTANDING, FREEDOM OF THE PRESS WILL BECOME MEANINGLESS AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE BLAMED FOR IT, INSTEAD OF THE CULTS.+ - BERNAMA MORE 1448