

# Think of people and country, PM tells newsmen

NST 13 OCT 1981

**KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. —** Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight the needs of the nation and the people must always over-ride the freedom of the Press.

He said the narrow interests of the Press as an institution faded into insignificance "if we think of our country and our people."

Speaking at a National Press Club dinner tonight, the Prime Minister said freedom of the Press was a myth invented by the "so-called liberal West" to serve its own purpose.

"Our Press should not subscribe to that kind of freedom, much less be a part of their indirect intellectual hegemony."

"We should think of what is good for our country and our people as a whole," he added.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said freedom of the Press should be exercised with restraint and responsibility.

But quite a few of those in the profession felt that this meant a limitation on freedom of the Press.

Brushing aside this view, he said if total licence is considered as freedom of the Press, then this did not exist anywhere in the world.

"The loss of a minor freedom to an individual is of little consequence as

compared to the well-being of a nation," said the Prime Minister.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the Press was in an eminent position to contribute towards the needs of the nation.

"Just as you can agitate the people, you can also calm them and help them develop those values that can contribute most towards their well-being."

## Ethics

He said Malaysia needed a period of stability to consolidate its gains and build up work ethics and values that would make it strong and viable.

The Government, he said, would do its best but it needed the cooperation of everyone, including the Press.

He told the Pressmen: "You have done well so far but there is much more to be done before the people of Malaysia are united with one single objective — to build a greater Malaysia where peace and prosperity and the freedom of the responsible are assured."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he noticed in some cases a few reporters were somewhat carried away with their enthusiasm and zeal and their reports tended to be non-factual and verged

on sensationalism.

"There have also been cases where reports have been anything but objective," he added.

While admitting that the Press had the right to expose any shortcoming, whether in the Government or the private sector, he said it also had a responsibility to present a balanced picture.

"We should not forget the success and achievements," he said.

"Unless your reporting is balanced you will be failing in your important function of keeping the public informed."

He said failure to maintain a balance in reports would create an image of a country that did not seem to be able to do anything right.

"Your know very well that in the country we do a lot of things right," he added.

## Challenge

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the responsibility of the Press in Malaysia went beyond just accurate reporting due to its multi-racial society.

The sensitivities of the various races had to be considered, he said.

The Government, he said, took special care that political stability and peaceful co-existence were always taken into consideration in its ac-

tions and policies.

"It would be inimical to the efforts of the Government if the Press in their overzealousness were to report events without giving due consideration to the sensitivities of the various races," he said.

He said some people regarded the need to exercise restraint as a limitation to the proper and effective working of the media.

However, he said, these constraints should be regarded as a challenge to the skill and maturity of newsmen.

Absolute freedom of the Press did not exist anywhere.

There were always restraints, he said, whether from the Government, owners, advertisers, employees or others.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said even with him being the Prime Minister, his words were often twisted in order to suit the purpose of particular journals.

He said he recently refused to be interviewed by BBC on the telephone for his comments on the Government's policy regarding British suppliers.

He refused as he knew that everything he said would be used against him and Malaysia.

"To me, the BBC is not a part of the free Press system," he said