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Nation comes first

By NURAINA SAMAD

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the formulation of a National Communications Policy should take into consideration the over-riding interests of the nation and not those of any particular group.

The formulation of the policy, he stressed, should also be based on the reality of a developing nation that practised the principles of democracy and freedom.

should guarantee the security and harmony of the nation and society and not its destruction and disintegration.

He felt that in the context of communications, freedom had a very deep meaning which should be regarded as a means to achieve the national objectives.

"Freedom without responsibility, would impede our efforts to attain our national aspirations and objectives," he said.

Datuk Mahathir also reminded communications personnel that Malaysia had the foundation of a national philosophy in the Rukunegara and the Consti-

The communications policy should also align itself with the economic policy by helping the people to involve themselves in a positive manner in accomplishing the national aspirations.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir also stressed the importance of the role of the mass media in conveying the Government's message to the people with clarity so that misunderstanding and misinterpretation do not occur.

He said misunderstanding of the Government's messages would occur when the mass media neglected its social obligations towards the nation and the people.

"This means the media take it upon themselves to interpret national issues and problems from their own viewpoints which are based on their own values or those of the West which may not be suitable to those of our nation. They do this for their interests or to get a name," he said.

However, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir stressed that the role of the mass media was not confined to just disseminating information and messages or to instilling an awareness among the people to get involved in the Government's development projects.

He said the communications media must also act as a machinery to channel feedback, identify developmental needs and priorities and detect and evaluate the developmental objectives on the whole.

But the feedback must not be used as a tool to undermine the basic

"We cannot allow absolute personal interests to take precedence over those of the nation as this would lead to anarchy which would consequently destroy freedom," he said when opening the symposium on *Towards a National Communications Policy*.

More than 150 representatives from the mass media, marketing and telecommunications industry and academic institutions are attending the four-day symposium.

The Prime Minister said it was vital Malaysia's communications policy be modelled on the country's own background, experiences and desired values.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir noted that the formulation of such a policy would give rise to diverse reactions from various quarters, especially those who fantasised about the Western concept of freedom and the principle of "the right to communicate."

He said these people viewed the question of formulating such a policy "in a vacuum" without subscribing to the reality that absolute freedom did not exist even in countries considered the most liberal.

Objectives

A policy that was ideal and comprehensive in every respect would be quite impossible to create, he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said freedom

tution as well as key policies supporting this philosophy and realisation of the aspirations of the people.

He said because the relations between development and nation-building were especially close, the communications policy should be in tandem with and give meaning to other policies formulated to mobilise society and the nation in attaining specific objectives.

"If our education policy is to eradicate illiteracy, then the communications policy should help mobilise a communications system in preparing a non-formal education environment to help in this objective, to upgrade the functions of ETV and to broadcast suitable education through the mass

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principles already accepted.

"What we need is feedback that is critical yet healthy and constructive which can guide the Government as the trustee of the people in its efforts to guarantee the attainment of our national objectives."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir reiterated the Government's objective of building a modern Malaysia that is respected, highly-principled, prosperous and united.

"The nation we envisage is a Malaysia that is progressive, strong, stable and resilient."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir also spoke of the need to strengthen the national news agency for domestic and foreign news functions in efforts to reinforce the country's own communications facilities.

Regional co-operation should be strengthened in efforts to reduce the imbalance in the flow of information from developed countries to Third World nations.

He said such a move was needed as a weak and slow domestic information and communications system would only result in the absorption of undesirable elements.