

# Use your freedom wisely: Dr M

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight reminded local writers to use their freedom in an intelligent manner as they have a responsibility towards society, religion and themselves.

"Freedom is a weapon. It can be used advantageously by responsible people or indiscriminately by irresponsible parties," he said at the launching of the *Berita Harian Literary Fellowship* here.

The Prime Minister

said the Government always regarded writers as close friends in administration and the nation's development.

"I myself welcome constructive criticism and feedback provided by writers, whether he is a literary man or a journalist."

## Shallow

As writers are given the trust to practise their freedom openly, it is the responsibility of every writer not only to understand the limitations of this freedom but also to equip themselves with

precise knowledge so that this freedom can be practised intelligently, he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir also said writers must equip themselves with every available information on a particular subject before they criticise or summarise the subject.

"Shallow and isolated comments would not only confuse readers but also make difficult the Government's efforts to resolve the issue. Writers must understand what they are doing and do it responsibly."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir added that writing good or in support of what the Government was doing did not mean becoming a propaganda machine.

On the contrary, it showed the writer's courage, he said.

"It is easy and popular for writers to criticise, especially if it is aimed at those in power. But to hear something factual and good is difficult. Writers who are responsible must be brave if the country's development is to continue. Social critics must be brave in writing the truth along with criticising the wrong."

Writers, he said, must also have wisdom, not to twist facts but to differentiate between good and bad and to act responsibly for the sake of national security and solidarity.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir warned that the future would be more challenging as conditions in the country are far from developed and the global community is continuously competing for development in the various fields.

He said it would be unfortunate for society if writers did not care about the existing development tempo around them.

"It would be unfortunate for us if our writers could not find or uncover the secrets or the reasons behind the success of other races."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said freedom and

its limitations are more important for Malaysian writers as they are working in a unique environment.

The people's economic and social status are not on par. The people are also exposed to outside threats just waiting to exploit their weaknesses.

## Negative

If freedom as understood by the Western writers is practised here, it would lead to negative effects and threaten the nation's security.

He said it was most unfortunate that there existed a small group of writers who could not accept this truth.

Writers, he added, must remind themselves from time to time that the main reason for the May 13 incident was that some political group at that time was too enthusiastic with the freedom of speech so much so that they forgot the limitations that could be accepted by a multi-racial society.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the freedom concept should be upheld but reminded that absolute freedom did not exist anywhere.

"In the context of a society, the freedom of a party is only to the extent that it did not threaten the interests of the majority. A society or nation cannot be regarded as a laboratory to experiment a social theory. We cannot test the extent of freedom before it leads to destruction."