

MAHATHIR (EMBARGO: FOR AUTOMATIC RELEASE AT 2300 HRS TODAY,
SEPT. 4)

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KUALA LUMPUR, SEPT. 4 (BERNAMA) -- DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD ASSURED THE PRESS TONIGHT OF PRESS FREEDOM, BUT SAID THEY SHOULD EXERCISE IT WITH A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS SOCIETY.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THE FREEDOM WAS SOMETIMES ABUSED, ESPECIALLY BY NEW PUBLICATIONS WHICH TRIED TO ATTRACT READERS BY RAISING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES OR BY DRUMMING UP CONTROVERSY.

+SOME BRING UP THE ISSUE OF RACE, SOME EXPLOIT SEX, AND STILL OTHERS DELIBERATELY PIT ONE GROUP AGAINST ANOTHER,+ HE SAID IN THE +EHWAL SEMASA+ (CURRENT AFFAIRS) PROGRAMME OVER TELEVISION MALAYSIA.

+NEWSPAPERS WOULD POSE A QUESTION TO ONE GROUP AND THEN ASK ANOTHER TO COMMENT ON THE RESPONSE.+

HE HOPED THAT THE ESTABLISHED PAPERS ESPECIALLY WOULD NOT USE SUCH TACTICS AS RAISING SENSITIVE ISSUES TO INCREASE THEIR CIRCULATION. -- MORE

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MAHATHIR 2 KUALA LUMPUR (EMBARGO)

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID: +I FIND THAT IN THIS SITUATION (WHERE NEW PUBLICATIONS PLAY UP SENSITIVE ISSUES TO LURE READERS) THE ESTABLISHED PAPERS FEEL THREATENED AND ARE AFRAID THAT IF THEY ACT RESPONSIBLY THEY MAY REDUCE THEIR SHARE OF THE MARKET.

+MAYBE I AM WRONG, BUT THE ESTABLISHED PAPERS APPEAR TO ME TO WANT TO ALSO USE SENSITIVE ISSUES FOR MARKETING PURPOSES. I HOPE THIS DOES NOT HAPPEN,+

STRESSING THE NEED FOR THE MEDIA TO HAVE A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS SOCIETY, HE SAID THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE THE ONE TO BEAR THE BURDEN IF THEY CAUSED UNREST.

THE PRIME MINISTER HAD BEEN ASKED TO COMMENT ON PRESS FREEDOM IN THE COUNTRY WHERE CERTAIN PUBLICATIONS EXPLOITED SEX TO ATTRACT READERS WHILE OTHERS COMPLAINED OF TOO MANY RESTRICTIONS.

ACTUALLY, HE SAID, THE GOVERNMENT WAS IN A DILEMMA OVER PRESS FREEDOM IN THE COUNTRY. -- MORE

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MAHATHIR 3 KUALA LUMPUR (EMBARGO)

+WHEN I JUST TOOK OVER AS PRIME MINISTER, I WAS OF THE VIEW THAT WE SHOULD GIVE MORE FREEDOM TO THE PRESS. I INVITED ALL THE EDITORS AND SUGGESTED THAT THEY SHOULD HAVE A COLUMN TO CRITICISE THE GOVERNMENT AND BRING UP ISSUES REQUIRING GOVERNMENT ATTENTION,+ HE ADDED.

HE ALSO FELT THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE MORE LIBERAL IN ISSUING THE KDN OR PUBLICATION PERMIT.

HE SAID THAT PUBLICATION PERMITS, WHICH WERE SO DIFFICULT TO GET IN THE PAST, WERE NOW GIVEN TO ALL WHO APPLIED FOR THEM.

+I FIND THAT SINCE WE ISSUED MANY KDN PERMITS, MANY PAPERS HAVE COME UP. BUT WE ALSO FIND THAT THE FREEDOM THAT WE GIVE HAS SOMETIMES BEEN ABUSED BY SOME PAPERS?+ HE SAID. -- BERNAMA