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KUALA LUMPUR, AUG 16 (BERNAMA) -- DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD HAS URGED THE PRESS OR MASS MEDIA TO HAVE A RESPONSIBLE ATTITUDE TOWARDS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, LIKE THE OTHER QUARTERS IN THE COUNTRY.

HE SAYS THAT IN A MODERN SOCIETY, THE MASS MEDIA PLAYS A VITAL ROLE TO THE EXTENT THAT IT IS REGARDED AS THE FOURTH POWER IN WESTERN COUNTRIES.

IN AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUGUST EDITION OF THE MERDEKA, THE OFFICIAL UMNO PUBLICATION, HE SAYS THAT WHEN NEWSPAPERS OR THE MASS MEDIA HAVE POWER, THEY ARE ALSO EXPOSED TO THE POSSIBILITY OF ABUSE OF POWER.

HE SAYS THIS ALSO OCCURS IN MALAYSIA, FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE REPORTING OF SENSATIONAL NEWS TO PROMOTE THE NEWSPAPER CONCERNED.

THE NEWS REPORTED MAY BE TRUE, BUT THE METHOD OF ITS EXPOSURE CAN BRING ABOUT NEGATIVE EFFECTS. -- MORE

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+SOMETIMES THERE ARE REPORTERS WHO WISH TO ATTRACT ATTENTION BY WRITING NEWS REPORTS AS A MEANS OF SHOWING OFF THEIR SKILLS WITH DISREGARD FOR TRUTH OR ACCURACY,+ HE SAYS.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAYS THIS HOWEVER DID NOT INVOLVE ALL NEWSPAPERS OR ALL REPORTERS, BUT IT HAS HAPPENED.

+FOR EXAMPLE, A PERSON MAKING A STATEMENT OR SPEECH MAY STRESS ON ONE ASPECT HE THINKS IMPORTANT BUT TOO OFTEN WE FIND THAT THE REPORTER HAS HIGHLIGHTED A BURIED ASPECT, WHICH IS NOT IMPORTANT AND WHICH IS TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT.

+THIS LEADS TO THE REPORT ON THE SPEECH CONTRADICTING THE INTENTION BEHIND THE STATEMENT.+

HE ALSO SAYS THAT IN THE ZEAL TO MAKE THE REPORT MORE SENSATIONAL, THINGS THAT ARE NOT TRUE OR WHOSE ACCURACY IS HARD TO DETERMINE ARE SOMETIMES ASCRIBED TO THE SPEAKER.

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+SOMETIMES THIS CAN AFFECT THE PERSONAL REPUTATION OF A PERSON WHO IS UNABLE TO DEFEND HIMSELF BECAUSE HE DOES NOT HAVE A SPECIAL COLUMN TO DO SO IN THE MASS MEDIA.

+HE MAY NOT EVEN RECOURSE TO THE COURT BECAUSE LITIGATION CAN BE A TEDIOUS AND EXPENSIVE PROCESS THAT CAN LEAD TO ALL SORTS OF OTHER ACCUSATIONS BEING MADE LATER.+

HE SAYS THIS PROSPECT IS ENOUGH TO SCARE ANYONE WHO HAS BECOME A VICTIM OF SUCH REPORTING AND IN THIS SITUATION, THE NEWSPAPER AND THE REPORTER CONCERNED WILL FEEL THEY CAN DO ANYTHING THEY LIKE AND NO ONE CAN STOP THEM.

+THIS ATTITUDE WILL SURELY LEAD TO ABUSE OF POWER,+ HE STRESSES.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAYS THAT LATELY, +WE SEEM TO BE VERY CONCERNED WITH EXPOSING ALL KINDS OF WRONGDOINGS UNTIL VISITORS COMING TO MALAYSIA GET THE IMPRESSION THAT THE COUNTRY IS A VERITABLE NEST OF INIQUITY, AND FULL OF ROBBERS, RAPISTS AND OTHER CRIMINALS.+

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THIS GIVES A FALSE PICTURE OF THE COUNTRY BEING A DANGEROUS PLACE WHEN IT IS NOT LIKE THAT AT ALL.

+WHAT HAS BEEN REPORTED MAY BE TRUE BUT NOT TO THE PROPORTION MADE OUT TO BE BY THE REPORTS WHICH HAVE SEVERELY AFFECTED THE COUNTRY'S IMAGE,+ HE ADDS.

+THERE IS ALSO AN INTEREST TO COPY THE JOURNALISM OF THE WEST WHEN OUR SOCIETY IS NOT LIKE THE WESTERN SOCIETY AT ALL. FOR INSTANCE, AS A DEVICE TO PROMOTE THE NEWSPAPER, THE REPORTERS WRITE ARTICLES EXPOSING OR REVEALING THE SO-CALLED TRUTH.

+SUCH EXPOSURE MAY BE GOOD IN ITSELF BUT SOMETIMES THINGS THAT ARE NOT TRUE ARE ALSO INCLUDED.+

THE PRIME MINISTER STRESSES THAT THE PRINT MEDIA AND REPORTERS SHOULD COOPERATE IN EFFORTS TO DEVELOP THE NATION. -- MORE

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