

DRUM ON PRESS CONTROL

STAR 2 AUG 1988

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight that control of the Press was not the issue, but who controlled it and why.

The Prime Minister said that no Press in the world was not controlled.

All the Press in the world was controlled by specific groups, he said, adding that the well-known international media was controlled by the Jews who had become citizens of Western countries.

He said they either owned the Press or held important posts. "As a result, the Western Press is not free as they have to bow to Zionist interests.

"It is clear that the foreign Press is subjected to greater pressure because of the Zionist influence compared to the control the Government exerts on the Malaysian Press.

"If the other newspapers are not controlled by their owners they are controlled either by the directors or the journalists themselves. There are also others which are controlled by the advertisers.

"Therefore, the Press is forced to reflect the views of those who control it. Journalists or editors may think they control the Press if it is 'free' but editors and journalists have their own bias as well," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, said those who depended on the Press for reports and commentaries would find their freedom to assess for themselves hampered by this biasness.

"As far as they are concerned, the newspaper is controlled by others and they have no right and no control.

He also referred to the slogan of the *New York Times* — "All the news that is fit to print." He said: "The question is who considers what is 'fit' and 'unfit' to print?"

"Are these people qualified to make decisions? If they are the ones who determine what will be printed, doesn't this mean that the *New York Times* is controlled?"

Dr Mahathir stressed that the Press was not free even in the United States "where many of the journalists who criticise the Malaysian Government for allegedly controlling the Press come from."

"What is important is not whether the Press is free but whether such an effective

tool (Press freedom) is put to beneficial use.

"If goodness is achieved by toppling the government, then the Press should contribute towards this end.

"However, before the Press takes part in the effort to topple the present government, the most pertinent question that should be asked is whether the government that takes over will be better," he said.

Dr Mahathir said history had shown that all "revolutionary governments" which took over after toppling those in power were worse and more tyrannical than the previous government.

"We must be careful. If we are not yet convinced that a new type of government is better we should not deliberately damage or hamper the efforts of the present government," he said.

● TURN TO PAGE THREE

PM: Progress or destroy the nation, it's up to us

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FROM PAGE ONE

The Prime Minister said there were people who would point out news reports supporting the Government as if newspapers which printed such reports were no longer newspapers.

"And they also allege that the Government supports these newspapers. Local writers who want to ingratiate themselves with such people follow suit in criticising the Government.

"It is very shameful that there are still Malaysians who suffer from an 'inferiority complex' and believe that the 'White Man' is always correct and their own race needs to get approval from them."

Dr Mahathir said the Press, with its influence, could make constructive criticism: "More good could come from this rather than adopting cynical attitudes and criticising for the sake of criticising."

He said the Government had to give full attention to overcome several major problems now that the general election was over.

"If every effort of the Government is hampered by unconstructive criticism or misinterpreted, we will not succeed. Ultimately the people and the nation will suffer," he said.

He added: "This is not an appeal by me. Neither is it a threat. It is my personal view because of my unhappiness at seeing some newspapers being carried away by the Western trend on 'freedom of the Press' to the extent that they do not care about the adverse effects it will have on the country."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians were becoming more interested in the Press and the circulation of most newspapers had increased since

Independence.

This was due to the country's economic stability and development, he said.

"Greater circulation means wider readership and greater media influence on the masses and what happens to a nation.

"It is therefore important that the Press be controlled by responsible people," he said.

Dr Mahathir stressed that by responsible, he meant "responsible to the country."

"The Press should not give priority to the business aspect (of the newspaper industry) to the extent of damaging national interests.

"This is where the wisdom of those in control in the Press comes in. It is probably necessary to expose the mismanagement of the Government in the interest of the nation. But it must first be determined whether the truth of the matters to be exposed could aggravate the situation in the country."

The Prime Minister added that the nation had the potential to become a developed country on par with other nations.

"But we also have the potential to destroy (the nation). It is up to us to choose which potential — to progress or to destroy the nation.

"I'm confident that none among us would like to see our country be destroyed. Unfortunately, while we don't wish for destruction, we do not take into account the effects of our actions," he said.

"Everyone has a role to play. And the Press in this modern era certainly takes the main role," he said.