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KUALA LUMPUR, MARCH 10, (BERNAMA) -- PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD TONIGHT CRITICISED CERTAIN LOCAL JOURNALISTS WHO HIGHLIGHT THEIR OWN COUNTRY'S SHORTCOMINGS AND FAILURES.

+HOWEVER I AM HAPPY THAT MALAYSIAN JOURNALISTS WERE BY AND LARGE FREE FROM THESE TRAITS,+ HE SAID.

SPEAKING AT A DINNER SPONSORED BY THE MALAYSIAN NATIONAL PRESS CLUB HERE, HE SAID WRITING SUCH ADVERSE REPORTS WAS NOT THE WAY TO HELP THE NATION.

+NONE OF US WILL GAIN BY RUNNING DOWN THIS COUNTRY AND MAKING DIRE PREDICTIONS COME TRUE,+ HE SAID.

HE SAID THE TRUTH WAS THAT OTHER COUNTRIES WERE WORSE INCLUDING THE DEVELOPED ONES. -- MORE

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+I NOTE THAT CERTAIN NEWSPAPERS NOW DO PUBLISH NEWS ABOUT POVERTY IN EUROPE AND AMERICA,+ THE PRIME MINISTER SAID.

+WHAT HAS BEEN WRITTEN IS ONLY THE TIP OF THE ICEBERY AS EXTENSIVE POVERTY, RACIAL AND COLOUR DISCRIMINATION AND ALL TYPES CRIME CAN BE FOUND IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES,+ HE SAID.

SUCH INCIDENTS WERE COMMON IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES BUT THEY WERE THE ONES WHICH CRITICISED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ABOUT THIS, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID.

+HOWEVER FOREIGN JOURNALISTS DO NOT HIGHLIGHT THESE SHAMEFUL THINGS LIKE SOME OF THE LOCAL JOURNALISTS,+

+DISTASTE FOR A PERSON OR GROUP SHOULD NOT MAKE US TAKE IT OUT ON OUR OWN COUNTRY,+ THE PRIME MINISTER SAID.

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+WE ARE A FREE PEOPLE AND IF ANYONE WISHES TO DENIGRATE HIS OWN COUNTRY, IT IS HIS RIGHT,+DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID.

ON DEMOCRACY, HE SAID IT WAS INVENTED SO AS TO FREE THE PEOPLE ONCE AND FOR ALL FROM FEAR OF THE GOVERNMENT.

BY MAKING THE GOVERNMENT IMPERMANENT IT WAS THOUGHT THAT OPPRESSION AND FEAR COULD BE REMOVED AND PEOPLE COULD CRITICISE THE GOVERNMENT FREELY.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID PERHAPS IN A DEMOCRACY FEAR FROM BODILY HARM HAD BEEN MORE OR LESS REMOVED BUT A PERSON COULD BE ASSASSINATED THROUGH DEFAMATION.

+IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY IT IS SO EASY TO DEFAME AND DESTROY AND GET AWAY WITH IT.+

A PUBLIC FIGURE WHO DEPENDS ON POPULARITY, COULD JUST AS WELL LOST IT IF HE WAS DEFAMED, HE SAID. -- BERNAMA

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