

# DUTY OF A FREE PRESS

By S.A. Dadameah

**KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says Malaysian journalists should have a greater sense of responsibility and patriotism over the question of Press freedom.**

"There must be self-discipline (among the journalists) although this may affect the sales of their papers," the Prime Minister said tonight.

He said the Government was faced with a "dilemma" over the question of Press freedom.

"If we allow extreme freedom, the country's well-being could be threatened and development hampered.

"On the other hand, if we act to restrict the Press, we will be accused of being undemocratic," he said at the annual Press dinner and awards presenta-

tion at the Putra World Trade Centre.

"Faced with this dilemma, we can only count on the sense of responsibility and patriotism of our journalists," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Press freedom was a key aspect in preserving democracy.

"Without criticisms and comments from a free Press, without feedback on the thinking and reaction of the people, the Government could make mistakes," he said.

And without information disseminated by a free Press, the people would not know or understand what was going on around them, he added.

Dr Mahathir also spoke of the mass media in some countries which came under direct government control and the consequences of absolute Press freedom.

He said he was touching on these matters not because he wanted to destroy Press freedom or democracy.

"There are people who make such accusations whenever I say something. De-

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mocracy is successfully practised in this country. Press freedom exists in our country.

"But we must remain conscious of what may happen. With this awareness, I believe we will be more responsible in upholding democracy in Malaysia," he said.

Dr Mahathir called on the Press to help broaden the people's knowledge of democracy.

He said that belief in the democratic system was a good thing but without knowledge of its use, democracy could not ensure a nation's well-being.

He said absolute Press freedom gave the same effect as a stifled Press.

"If we agree that Press freedom is part of democracy but concede that absolute freedom can bring about grave effects, we need to determine the role the Press

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# PM: Political stability most important

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should play to influence the Government, journalists and the people," he said.

The Prime Minister said the most important thing in Malaysia was political stability.

He said that except for the May 13 incident in 1969, the country had been politically stable since independence.

Power struggles and campaigning were normal in a democracy, he said but cautioned that such activities could "give a wrong picture of our stability because of the emphasis of the reports and the language used."

Dr Mahathir said the Press, citing its "right to know" was bent on exposing decisions — whether taken regarding certain companies, organisations or the nation — before the

matters had been thoroughly discussed.

He said that when this happened, the people involved in the discussions would no longer exercise flexibility with each other.

"Because of this, some efforts fail even before they can get started," he said.

Dr Mahathir said if the discussions were not leaked to the Press it was possible that those involved in the talks would come to terms with each other.

"But the Press frequently disregard efforts that are good. Their scoop is more important because of their so-called freedom and right-to-know," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the Press should play a more meaningful role towards instilling in their readers values such as the will to work hard, trustworthi-

ness and determination to succeed.

"We regret that sometimes the papers choose not to give attention to these values but instead show a skeptical attitude towards the Government's efforts," he said.

He said it was not easy to change the people's outlook but efforts must start in this direction because without such values the people could not progress.

The Prime Minister said a strong government was necessary if the nation was to prosper and grow.

"This is because the Government not only runs the country but is also expected to help the private sector in their economic activities," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's success in reviving its economy was widely recognised both within the country and abroad because the Government

dared to act effectively although its actions were not popular.

"Our efforts, however had not been easy because there were people who did not understand us and their views were some times given much publicity," the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir said that while he felt that newspapers should not highlight too much on political issues, they should help step up knowledge about politics, such as the system of democracy that Malaysia practised.

"Many would say that democracy can bring happiness to the nation if practised in its true sense.

"What is not understood however, is that democracy can also bring about a nation's downfall if not practised wisely and in a responsible manner."