

Freedom is not only to criticise, says PM

PETALING JAYA, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir ~~Mohamad~~ said tonight that the press in the country is free to either criticise or support the Government.

Press freedom did not only mean freedom to criticise the Government but also freedom to support the Government, the Prime Minister said.

He said that there was a view that if the press supported the Government, it indicated a lack of freedom.

And if the press opposed the Government, it was considered free, although it might be doing so out of fear of certain groups outside the Government or it worried that it would not be popular and their newspapers would not sell well, he said.

"Therefore, such newspapers are also not free," he added at the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) dinner at the Petaling Jaya Hilton Hotel.

Dr Mahathir said that in democratic countries in the West, there were pro-government and anti-government newspapers.

"But because there are three or four newspapers in Malaysia which do not make wild accusations, the Malaysian Government is accused of not upholding freedom of the press," he added.

The Prime Minister said there were many newspapers in the country that were anti-government and published "highly adverse" reports and insinuations.

He added: "These newspapers also report blatant lies. But they still exist."

"The existence of these newspapers in Malaysia

also does not stop certain people from alleging that the press is not free. In short, whatever the West does is not wrong, but if Malaysia and other developing countries do the same thing, we are wrong."

Dr Mahathir said foreign journalists and others only read some English newspapers which supported the Government and alleged that there was no press freedom in the country.

Certain groups in Malaysia blindly agreed with them and said "yes, of course there is no freedom of the press in Malaysia," he said.

This, he said, only reflected the "colonial mentality" of these people who only acted as an "echo" or "mynah which is good at mimicking" but could not express their own views and accepted everything uttered by the foreigners.

"And when these foreigners deny something, these people also make a similar denial. Don't they have any pride? This is how their minds have become shackled, to the extent that when foreigners proposed to have our GSP privileges cancelled, they also called for the same thing. Mental colonisation seems to be more effective than physical domination," he said.

"The fact is that freedom of the press does not exist anywhere, in liberal democratic countries or in a dictatorship," he said; and added that even in liberal democratic countries, news reports and articles in the mass media were controlled by influential people within the media itself.

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Hold to the truth, PM tells the press

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Dr Mahathir said that when he was in New York to address the United Nations, adverse reports on Malaysia were published in *The Wall Street Journal* and the *Asim Wall Street Journal*, but not a word of his speech appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* or any major American newspaper.

In contrast, their dignitaries who visited Malaysia were given extensive coverage by the Malaysian newspapers, he said.

"Who is practising freedom of the press, they or us?" he asked.

Dr Mahathir said several leaders and officials who came for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and the Group of 15 summit here had remarked that they found Malaysia devel-

oped, peaceful and sophisticated, totally different from what they had read in western news agency reports.

He said there were probably some NUJ members who were anti-government, but added that the members should at least have a sense of patriotism towards Malaysia.

"Just because you dislike the Government, you don't have to discredit the country and your own race and become the tools of the foreign press."

"Don't resort to publishing baseless reports. Just because the foreign newspapers don't like anything positive about countries where they are no longer the master. Let us not sell our dignity," he said.

He asked the press to hold to the truth and not

allow itself to be ruled by hatred for the Government or by money or there would be no press freedom.

"Don't think that only the Government can check press freedom. The (newspaper) owner, director, editor, financial considerations, the need to be popular all these can jeopardise press freedom," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government leaders did not have any "absolute" powers, and the people could replace them and the courts could overrule government decisions.

In view of this, he said, the press in Malaysia must accept the restrictions placed on them as these were not meant to muzzle them but to protect national interest.