

PM identifies groups with influence

# Power brokers of mass media

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**PETALING JAYA, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad dismissed the belief among certain quarters that only the Government can influence and adversely affect the freedom of the Press.**

The Prime Minister said newspaper owners, company directors, editors, and financially-interested groups can also affect Press freedom.

In such a situation, newspapers which are geared towards specific targets and controlled by certain groups who do not hold on to the truth can no longer claim to be free, Dr Mahathir told a fund-raising dinner organised by the National Union of Journalists here.

He said the truth was that absolute Press freedom did not exist anywhere in the world, whether in a liberal democratic country or in country governed by dictators.

"In liberal democratic countries, news and features in the mass media are controlled by individuals who have power in these organisations.

"These people could either be the owners, the editors or companies which buy up advertising space in the newspapers. These people have the authority to censor the news items and highlight news which interest them," Dr Mahathir said.

These people have vested political interests.

He cited his visits to the United Nations in New York as instances when certain foreign newspapers would publish adverse reports on Malaysia.

These newspapers would not print even a single word of his speeches.

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These newspapers probably believed that none of the Prime Minister's speeches was "fit to print," especially after his cutting remarks on the "wrongs" of developed nations and the ways they have managed to suppress them.

Dr Mahathir said: "On the other hand, visiting foreign leaders or dignitaries to Malaysia often have their tours and speeches extensively covered by the local Press. Who actually practises freedom of the Press — us or them?"

"Are we wrong in believing that newspapers in liberal democratic countries are

also not free to report the truth? They are controlled by people with vested interests who do not permit the truth to be reported.

"If their newspapers are not free, then why are they speaking about the freedom of the Press? How is it that there are people in this country who keep accusing us of not having a free Press, but do not say a word about the same in other countries?"

He said there were people who might disagree with the Government, but this was not a good enough reason to discredit the nation and the people, and in so doing, be used as a tool by foreign newspapers.

Dr Mahathir drew his audience's attention to the fact that foreigners, when reading English publications which are sympathetic to the Government, immediately concluded that freedom of the Press does not exist in Malaysia.

When this happens, some sectors in the country made loud statements agreeing with this allegation.

"Once again the colonial mentality surfaces in Malaysia.

"These people are no different than parrots who echo well the spoken words of others but are unable to voice their own thoughts. Do these people have any dignity at all?"

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