

Dr M: Press freedom doesn't mean the right to print lies

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By K.H. Lim

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Malaysia cannot accept the kind of Press freedom practised in Australia where the media are free to come up with all sorts of lies, Datuk Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said that he had conveyed this during his discussion with Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister Senator Gareth Evans who was here for the Asean Post Ministerial Conferences on Tuesday.

Dr Mahathir who is Umno president was speaking to reporters after chairing an Umno Supreme Council meeting here when he was asked to comment on his

meeting with Senator Evans.

He said that in Australia there was unbridled Press freedom where the media was free to come up with all sorts of lies.

In this respect, the Prime Minister also stated that the Australian Government should not perpetuate such reasoning.

Malaysia is of the opinion that Press freedom did not mean the Press was free to undermine others but to publish truthful reports, he said.

"I informed him that we are aware of Press freedom over there. We also have Press freedom even though a lot of foreigners in Malaysia say we don't.

"The reason is that most of the foreigners may be only reading the New **Straits Times** and **Berita Harian** or **Utusan** but they do not read **Harakah**, **Watan** and **Rocket** and others.

"I also explained that in England too, there are newspapers which support the Government and newspapers which don't support the Government.

"The existence of newspapers which support the Government does not mean there is no Press freedom in Malaysia."

"The Press is free but a newspaper that purposely lies does not mean it is Press freedom.

"Freedom is to report what is true but it seems

that in Australia, their freedom is more than normal freedom, that is freedom to fabricate all kinds of lies.

"Our opinion is that that was what the Government does not need to defend. "Whether they agree or not, we don't bother. Our view is that Press freedom does not include making up stories to run down others but to tell the truth and give both sides of the story.

Asked what was Senator Evans' response to his explanation, Dr Mahathir said it seemed that he agreed.

In a letter to Dr Mahathir which was delivered by Senator Evans on Tuesday,

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Council discussed seats declared vacant

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Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke had admitted that the strained relations was caused by the **Embassy** television series telecast by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

On his letter to Indonesian President Suharto which was delivered by Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba yesterday, Dr Mahathir said it was not on any specific issue.

He described it as a normal communication reflective of the close relations between two neighbours.

However, he confirmed that one of the issues raised was the Sipadan and Ligitan islands which were also claimed by Indonesia.

On possible by-elections for Limbongan and Sungei Pinang which were declared vacant by the Kelantan State Assembly, he said the matter was discussed but no decision was taken as the matter was still in court.

Asked whether Umno would contest the two seats, he said: "We will cross the **sungei** (river) when we come to it. We have not reached the **sungei** yet."