

CNS1757

R GE 01-08 00183 E066

REPEAT aae tbe

Mahathir-press

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 1 (Bernama) -- Governments will fail in their duty if they allow abuse of press freedom to the extent that it can cause lies to be spread and undermine the stability and economic well-being of the people, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said that of late, it had been accepted that lies could be fabricated in the name of freedom of the press.

+With the increasingly powerful weapons at the disposal of the press, it is entirely possible for the press not only to create totally erroneous views and opinions but actually to undermine the stability and even the economy of countries,+ he said when opening the second conference of Asean information ministers here.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said events had shown that the guardians and practitioners of press freedom were not averse to using this unlimited licence.

+New and more telling ways are continuously being invented so that lies can be accepted as the truth,+ he added. -- more

♥01/08/15-42MST

R GE 01-08 00170 E076

REPEAT aae tbe

Mahathir - press 2 Kuala Lumpur (rptng, inserting +among other things+ in second para)

Asked by reporters later whether he was referring to the +lies+ in the Australian press, he said: +Yes, precisely. They (Australian press) fabricate stories.+

Relations between Australia and Malaysia have been strained for about a year following, among other things, reports in the Australian media which Malaysia took offence to.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said fabricated stories were of course entertaining and they (the press) made money out of them without realising the consequences.

+You can report everything that we do. You can report what is wrong but you should also report what is right.

+But if you concentrate on reporting what is wrong, you can do so provided they (the reports) are factual. But when it comes to a stage of inventing bad things about others, I think you have breached the limit of press freedom,+ he said. -- more

♥01/08/15-42MST

R GE 01-08 00214 E077

REPEAT aae tbe

Mahathir - press 3 Kuala Lumpur

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Malaysia appreciated the fact that the Australian government could not control the country's press, adding that 'if you cannot control them, you should at least disassociate yourself from them'.

During the Asean Post Ministerial Conference here last month, Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans had said that his government had no control over the press in Australia.

In his speech today, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said that since English was the national tongue of some of the most populous and richest countries in the world, it was not surprising that the English-speaking nations largely control the world press.

He said the non-English speaking nations, which were also poor, could not have access to the world press to give their views or versions of whatever news was reported about them.

+As a consequence, the poor non-English speaking nations feel naked and defenceless. If freedom of the press is to be meaningful, then everyone should be able to present his side of the story.'

+What we are seeing is a one-sided exercise of that freedom. Those who have no access to the world press have no freedom,+ he said. -- more

♥01/08/15-42MST

CNS1761

R GE 01-08 00208 E078

REPEAT aae tbe

Mahathir - press 4 Kuala Lumpur

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said that when discussing human rights, justice and fair play, the question that ought to be asked was whether there was justice and fair play when only certain people could influence the minds of the world community.

In addition to that, he said, the question should also be asked whether human rights were not denied when whole nations were deprived of the right of expression and their freedom to air their views.

+Does press freedom refer only to the freedom of those who control the press in a country and not to the freedom of the people to air their views in the press?

+Does freedom of the press exist when only certain nations can air their versions of the truth and others may not?+ he asked.

The Prime Minister also said that some years ago there was an attempt by poor countries to reform the international information order.

He said that normally there was sympathy for the poor, but there was no sympathy shown to the poor nations' attempt to gain access to the international media and to fair reporting. -- more

♥01/08/15-42MST

CNS1762

R GE 01-08 00186 E087

REPEAT aae tbe

Mahathir - press 5 Kuala Lumpur

+One of the biggest United Nations' agencies was threatened with a cut-off in its finance if it entertains the pleas of the poor nations. And so, with unseemly haste the new information order was jettisoned.

" +The right to fabricate, to tell lies and to do selective and slanted reporting about poor nations remains,+ he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir also said that the Asean ministers responsible for information faced a daunting task -- they have to be responsible for both the free flow of information as well as to ensure the stability of their countries.

He said there would be many occasions when the two seem incompatible, when their responsibility for the development of their countries seem to run counter to their faith in the freedom of democracy.

+It is not easy for example to ban or expel a journalist. You don't do such a thing without getting a bashing from the Fourth Estate and those who consider themselves holier than us,+ he said.

-- more

♥01/08/15-43MST

CNS1919

R GE 01-08 00187 EG571

aae tbe

Mahathir - press 6 Kuala Lumpur (rptng, adding last para) (last)

He said tolerance must therefore be stretched to the maximum but no tolerance was necessary when there was evidence of deliberated lies which undermine the nation.

When speaking to reporters, the Prime Minister said he was not aware whether last month's issue of the Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER) was banned in Malaysia.

+I don't read the Far Eastern Economic Review because it is not an economic magazine at all. It's a political magazine. It should be called the Far Eastern Political Review.

He said other magazines gave facts and figures on economic performance but the FEER had nothing to do with economic issues.

The two-day conference is attended by Pehin Dato Haji Isa, special adviser to the Sultan of Brunei, Indonesian Information Minister Harmoko, Singapore Information Minister Brig-Gen George Yeo, Thai Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Meechai Viravaidya and Malaysian Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat.

The Philippines is represented by its ambassador to Malaysia, Encik Rodolfo Severino. -- Bernama

♥01/08/18-09MST