

Dr M takes Australian Press to task

By K.P. Waran

KUALALUMPUR, Thurs. -- Certain sectors of the Australian Press invent stories to entertain and make money without due consideration to the damaging implications their likes may bring, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said he appreciated the fact that the Australian Government could not control its Press, but stressed that it should dissociate itself from them.

"If you cannot control them, you should at least dissociate yourself from them," Dr Mahathir said when asked to elaborate on his speech at the Asean Information Ministers conference.

Dr Mahathir was asked by reporters whether the "lies" he was referring to in his speech were connected to the Australian Press. He said: "Yes, precisely. They (Australian Press) fabricate stories."

Relations between Australia and Malaysia are somewhat strained following, among others things,

reports in the Australian media which gave offence to Malaysia and its leaders.

Dr Mahathir said fabricating stories could be entertaining. They (the Press) may also make money 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. I know this country is not perfect.

"But if they want to report on the wrong, then they can do so, provided they are factual.

"But when you come to the stage of inventing bad things about others, I think you have breached the limit of Press freedom.

"I am talking about the Australian Press, not the Government."

Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, who came here last month as the personal envoy of his Prime Minister, Mr Bob Hawke, had said that his Government had no control over the Press in Australia.

Dr. Mahathir added that he drew a line between free-

dom of the Press and freedom to tell lies.

"You see, while there should be freedom of the Press, there should not be freedom to tell lies, to perpetuate lies.

"We appreciate that they cannot control the Press...but if you cannot control them you should dissociate from them.

"We don't control the Press here, as you know very well. This morning, I was reading *Watan* (which) doesn't seem to reflect Government views."

Asked to elaborate on his perception of guided democracy which he mentioned in his speech, the Prime Minister said the Government had to draw up certain rules about these things.

Freedom was not a licence to tell lies, he said, adding that "you are going to have a lot of trouble" if people are allowed to come out and say things that would inflame passion.

In a multi-racial community like Malaysia, the people will go on the streets if this was done, he said.