

Dr M slams partisan reporting by the press

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By **CHOI TUCK WO**

WEEKEND

HONG KONG: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad spoke out yesterday against accusations that the Malaysian press was "tame" in its reporting of controversial issues, including the recent City Hall Volvo case.

The Prime Minister hit out at some foreign press for their partisan reports of major controversial events in certain countries.

Dr Mahathir said he noticed that when some countries did worse things (than the Volvo case), somehow the foreign press did not give

them very bad publicity.

"I don't know why. Maybe, they (the countries concerned) have better public relations. But we speak our mind," he said in reply to a question during a 45-minute session with some 200 journalists at the 62-year-old Foreign Correspondence Club here.

Also present was club president Steve Vines.

"If you say we have a tame press, my answer is that the press outside Malaysia is also tame when certain governments are concerned," he said.

"They criticise some governments but not others. So they are also tame

press."

Stressing the importance of guarding classified information, he said the country's administrative system would be in chaos if things like tender documents were leaked to the press.

"That is why we need a responsible press. But a very free press is often not responsible," he said.

The Prime Minister also criticised developed countries for continuing to pollute the environment with obnoxious gases and yet expect poor countries like Malaysia to maintain its forests in order to absorb such gases.

"If you say don't cut

our trees, you must pay us for the service of converting carbon dioxide to oxygen. It's only fair," he said.

"We're a poor country and you are asking a poor country to do a service for you for free while you produce all these pollutants."

He said having too many trees could be harmful too as this would attract mosquitoes and other insects.

"Why should we have malaria to support developed countries," he asked.

"Why not have some malaria in your own countries. That's all we are

asking."

To a question on the Penans, he said their way of life was unique if one did not have to share it.

"If you have to live half naked eating insects, monkeys and dying at the age of 40, you don't think it's great."

Just imagine, Dr Mahathir said, if the Romans, when they occupied Britain those days, would tell the British: "Look, stay in the caves. They're very nice. And, don't come out and be like us as we drink too much wine."

"Today, the British will still be living in the caves if they had listened to them."