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Mahathir-Bernama
BE INFORMATION-RICH. PM TELLS MALAYSIANS
(EMBARGO: For use after 10.30pm, June 2)

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KUALA LUMPUR, June 2 (Bernama) -- Malaysians should be exposed to information on more sophisticated subjects to create a well-informed society by the year 2020. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said tonight.

"The more information a society has in its control, the more advanced it will be," he said.

He said information had often been referred to as power and by extension, people in control of information were actually in control of power.

Such power in their control could possibly be bigger than power in the hands of politicians, Dr Mahathir said when launching the silver jubilee celebration of the national news agency, Bernama, at a dinner at Hotel Istana here.

About 800 people attended the dinner, including Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, several Menteri Besar, Deputy Ministers, State Executive Councillors and heads of departments. -- more

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▼02/06/15-52MST

CNS0713

U GE 02-06 00107 EA493

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Mahathir-Bernama 2 Kuala Lumpur (Embargo)

Dr Mahathir said if politicians could abuse their power, companies dealing in information could also do the same.

"Let us just imagine what would happen to the country and people if this happens," he said.

The Prime Minister said, on the other hand, if information was used wisely and disseminated to the people accurately, objectively and extensively, it could help towards creating a well-informed society.

"Any society which is information-rich and knows how to use it wisely will become a progressive society," he said. -- more

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CNS0734

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Dr Mahathir said the information industry held unlimited potential and continued to grow in line with the nation's economic development, befitting its description as an industry of the future.

But Bernama, at present, only controlled a small portion of the industry, estimated to have a market worth of tens of millions of ringgit annually, while the bulk was still in the hands of foreign agencies.

The Prime Minister said one way which Bernama could capitalise to strengthen its own position was by forming more permanent forms of cooperation with the more established agencies, especially those in East Asia.

He expressed confidence that Bernama's expertise, coupled with state-of-the-art technology which the foreign agencies had, would make such cooperation second to none to face the challenges ahead.

Bernama should also continue with efforts to expand its income base by introducing new products, upgrading the quality of existing products and to reduce costs. -- more

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▼02/06/16-18MST

CNS0746

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Dr Mahathir congratulated the management and staff of Bernama for successfully turning around the news agency by not only wiping out its accumulated deficit of RM9.5 million but also recording a surplus of RM3.1 million last year.

He was also happy to note that Bernama, which previously had to depend entirely on the government for sources of finance, was able to reduce such dependence to only 15 per cent annually.

The Prime Minister said the government would continue to reduce the subsidy element in Bernama through its policy of encouraging its agencies and departments to take whatever steps necessary to beef up their own financial sources.

But he said whatever approach taken by Bernama, it must not be at the expense of its original function, which is to gather and disseminate news.

"Without this conventional function, Bernama will not exist. Unfortunately, this editorial activity, like other social responsibilities, is one which probably is not profitable," he said. -- more

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▼02/06/16-36MST

CNS0756

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Besides soaring costs, Bernama also found it difficult to increase its fees among its local media subscribers.

As a result, a sizeable part of its profits derived from sales of information to non-media clients had to be used to subsidise its operations to media subscribers.

"In this regard, media organisations in the country, including the electronic media, need to find appropriate ways to assist Bernama in carrying out its social responsibility more effectively," he said.

He said government departments and state governments could also consider subscribing to Bernama's information services for a fee.

Earlier, Bernama chairman Datuk Haji Mazlan Nordin said Bernama, in the last 25 years, had been transformed from a news agency to a news and information agency in line with contemporary needs and development.

But, he said, whatever its status, Bernama would continue to function as a national news agency safeguarding the national interest. -- Bernama

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