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Mahathir-press

RESPONSIBLE PRESS NEED NOT FEAR GOVT, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

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PULAU PINANG, Dec 20 (Bernama) -- A responsible press aware of racial sensitivities and the importance of peace to national development need not fear government action because its freedom will always be safeguarded, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today.

He said that if a small group of individuals such as newspaper owners and writers threatened to disrupt peace and the wellbeing of the majority, then their right as the minority could not be used as an excuse to prevent the government from taking action against them.

"Freedom is for doing good and the government believes the people are free to criticise the government through the press. This will enable the government to rectify its policies and enhance its performance," he said when opening the Wisma Kwong Wah Yit Poh building here.

"Such criticisms are constructive and good but if the freedom is used to incite chaos and disorder, it cannot be viewed as good and taken lightly. Such freedom cannot be allowed by a government elected by the majority," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government had to exercise control on publication of news because of several sensitivities, including that of communities, which could lead to chaos and racial riots if these were made fun of. --

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"This is an effective tool in ensuring that the Malaysian press will not purposely play up racial issues that can lead to riots," he said, adding that apart from this, the Malaysian press had its freedom.

As such, he said, there was no reason why the vernacular press wanted to popularise itself by playing up racial issues and the position of certain communities in the country.

"Although what is written in the Chinese press is not read by other communities, it would be better if they too contributed towards creating an atmosphere and climate conducive to racial unity in Malaysia," he said.

He said that attempts by certain newspapers to portray one community as being neglected did not reflect reality and had bad intentions.

The sacrifice demanded from the mass media was small compared to the benefit they gained as a result of peace and development in the country, he said while expressing hope that the mass media would give greater importance to the country than their popularity as newspapers. -- more

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On claims by foreigners that there was no press freedom in Malaysia, he said the government was not bothered the least by it because the truth was that the Malaysian press was free to report what they liked provided they did not incite racial riots.

"Unfounded allegations by others is a small matter, requiring no cause for concern," he said.

He said no country in the world, whether democratic or otherwise, had a truly free press reporting the truth.

All news and features in the print or electronic media were controlled by certain people to the extent that readers or viewers only got what these people wanted them to get, he said.

He said those in control of the press were not always the government but frequently the owners or editors or reporters but the fact was that control by anyone meant there was no freedom. -- more

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In the West, writers or individuals with opposing views would not be entertained or even if they were only to a certain extent, he said.

"If such a view happened to be published in the newspaper, the editor will give his reply in the same issue. This will be repeated over and over until the opposing view is eradicated," he said.

He said the practice was accepted in the West as consistent with democracy but if a country like Malaysia had newspapers supportive of the government, there would be immediate accusation that the government controlled all the newspapers even if some were critical of the government.

-- Bernama

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