

# Work towards racial unity, vernacular papers advised

NSF 2 1DEC 1993

PENANG, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today there is no reason for vernacular newspapers to try to popularise themselves by harping on racial issues.

They should instead work towards creating racial unity, the Prime Minister said.

He said although Chinese newspapers were not read by other races, it would be better if they helped towards establishing an environment which could create racial unity.

Dr Mahathir said there was no country in the world where minority Chinese and Indians received better treatment of their language, education and culture than Malaysia.

Therefore, there was no reason why vernacular newspapers should play up such issues, he said.

He said the world had admitted that Malaysia had successfully fostered good relations among the races.

"No other multi-racial country in the world is as progressive and peaceful as Malaysia," Dr Mahathir said.

Opening the Kwong Wah Yit Poh's new printing plant and office here, Dr Mahathir said this achievement was the result of the co-operation of all, including the newspaper fraternity.

He said it was a small sacrifice on the part of the newspapers compared with the benefits that could be derived from a peaceful and progressive nation.

Therefore, he said, it was important that they put aside their quest for popularity in the interest of the nation.

He said it was important that some sensitivities be observed, including that concerning race. Such sensitivities, if not observed, could create racial riot and chaos, he said.

As such, he said, the Government had to control this aspect of newspaper publication to ensure that racial problems were not highlighted.

"It is an effective way of ensuring that newspapers

in the country will not touch on racial issues which can create racial riot.

"Other than that newspapers in Malaysia are free and this is evident from the contents of some newspapers and magazines in Malaysia which often hurl abuse and criticism at the Government."

Unfortunately, he said, foreigners could not read these newspapers as they were published in the local languages.

Dr Mahathir said allegations by foreigners that Malaysia did not exercise Press freedom did not bother the Government.

"What is important to the Government is the truth and Malaysian newspapers are free unless they fan racial sentiments.

"What is important to our country is not the right to ignite emotion but the right to safeguard peace and order which can help towards the development of the people and the country.

"Baseless allegations by other people are small matters which should be ignored."

Dr Mahathir said there was no freedom without responsibility and therefore a responsible newspaper which understood racial sensitivities in Malaysia and of the need for peace and development, should not be afraid of any Government action.

Kwong Wah Yit Poh, the oldest newspaper in Southeast Asia, was established about 83 years ago.

Also present were Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Chief Minister Dr Koh Tsu Koon, former Chief Minister Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu, tycoon Tan Sri Loh Boon Siew, Kwong Wah chairman Datuk Ong Hoo Kim and managing director Oon Choo Khye.

Dr Mahathir later visited the Syed Alatas mansion at Lebuh Armenian, which is undergoing restoration. The mansion was built in the 1860s by Syed Mohamed Alatas, a community leader of the Lebuh Acheh community.