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Mahathir-Press

PRICE TO PAY FOR TELLING LIES: MAHATHIR

(EMBARGO: For use after 2015 hrs today, April 3)

KUALA LUMPUR, April 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says press freedom does not allow the telling of lies and that there is a price to pay if the British press chooses to have the freedom to tell lies.

In an interview on "Whicker's World" aired today by ITV Britain, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's ban on British firms from new government contracts could be reviewed, but added that it was not for him to decide.

Asked by host Alan Whicker who would make the decision on the duration of the ban, Dr Mahathir said: "Well, we'll see if there is a change in the attitude of the press in the United Kingdom."

Malaysia imposed the ban after reports by the British media implied that Malaysian government leaders were corrupt and that contracts with British firms were shoddy deals. The ban effectively terminated all memoranda of understanding and letters of intent, causing British firms to lose out on billions of ringgit of business.

In the special interview "Alan Whicker Meets The Malaysian Prime Minister" conducted during the recent opening of the Pangkor Island Resort in Perak, Dr Mahathir said the British press should at least admit that telling of lies was not part of press freedom. -- more

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Mahathir-Press 2 Kuala Lumpur (Embargo)

"It should not say that well we have a right to tell lies about you and we have no right to tell lies about the press. I mean we should be equal," he replied to Whicker's question on what he wanted done to resolve the matter.

Whicker also made reference to Dr Mahathir's letter to the Financial Times of London on the subject which, among other things, stated that "the die is cast", implying that there would be no review of the decision at all.

Dr Mahathir said: "Well, it may sound final but we do expect the British papers and the British Government to avoid telling lies about us and souring our relations.

"You see, if they can reverse their stance and say, 'Well, we are sorry if the report was not based on facts,' and that you are all for telling the truth except when you don't know the truth, then I think that will resolve the problem.

"But everybody is insistent that this is freedom of the press. That's why I say if you want to have freedom to tell lies you have to pay a price for it," the prime minister said. The transcript of the interview was made available to Bernama. -- more

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(The banning of British firms was the second time Malaysia had retaliated against Britain after its "Buy British East" campaign in 1982, also initiated by Dr Mahathir, when Britain increased its education fees for Malaysian students).

Dr Mahathir, who was introduced by Whicker as the person who had launched the trade war against Britain, said he had nothing against press criticism but it must be based on facts.

"I will defend their right to criticise and tell the truth," he said.

He dismissed accusations, as suggested by the British news reports, that there were Malaysian intermediaries who made large amounts of money from the Pergau dam project, which was the focus of the British media allegations against Malaysian leaders.

Saying that this was the kind of reporting that was not based on facts, Dr Mahathir said there was no intermediary involved in the project and that it was decided through direct negotiation between the Malaysian and British governments. -- more

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While agreeing with Whicker that the British press also attacked British ministers and politicians, Dr Mahathir said he supposed they were entitled to do that as it was their own government and their own country.

However, Dr Mahathir said, he could not tolerate the British press telling lies about him and Malaysia.

To Whicker's suggestion that some people would wish to control the media in the wake of the relentless attack, Dr Mahathir said: "No, I don't think you should control. But, you should stop at telling lies. Stick to the truth."

He said newspapers should be responsible and the press people should not fabricate stories.

To Whicker's suggestion that some people had even said that Dr Mahathir was arrogant due to his "supreme" confidence in dealing with foreign governments, the prime minister said it could be due to the fact that people were not used to developing countries talking back and giving frank opinions. -- more

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aae the

Mahathir-Press 5 (last) Kuala Lumpur (Embargo)

Whicker referred to the recent row between Malaysia and Australia after Prime Minister Paul Keating had called Dr Mahathir a "recalcitrant" for not attending the first Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit in Seattle summoned by United States President Bill Clinton last year.

"But I have always believed in giving my views frankly," said Dr Mahathir, who is known to be critical of the West's policies on international affairs.

He also said that there was a tendency among people of European stock to "talk down" to people who are not of European stock.

"There is still that. Not with everyone, of course, but people in high positions," he said. -- Bernama

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