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Mahathir-Britain

IMPROVEMENT IN BRITISH MEDIA REPORTS ON MALAYSIA, SAYS PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, May 22 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today there has been an improvement in the British media reports on Malaysia after the Malaysian government banned new government contracts for British companies following adverse reports on the country.

"We notice an improvement, particularly after the person (Andrew Neil, editor of the Sunday Times) who started such reports had been transferred," he said.

"We will see whether his transfer will bring about a drastic difference in the (British media) reports," he told reporters at the airport after welcoming back Malaysia's badminton team which participated in the Thomas Cup tournament in Jakarta. Malaysia lost 0-3 to Indonesia.

Neil, 44, has been seconded to New York from next month to launch a current affairs programme of the Fox television network. He will be the executive editor of the new programme for seven months.

"In fact, he (Neil) was the cause (for the government's decision to ban new government contracts for British companies). Now that he is no more there, we will see whether there is any (drastic) difference in the British media reports (on Malaysia)," Dr Mahathir said. -- more

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Replying to a question, Dr Mahathir said the government will "wait a while" before deciding whether to offer contracts again to British firms because it wanted to ensure that the British media truly stopped its allegations against Malaysia.

"If we find that the British media reports the truth and no longer prints lies, there is no reason why we cannot resume business with them (British companies)," he said.

However, he added, the government would continue to monitor the developments in the British media reports on Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir reiterated that the government had never quarrelled with the British government following the British media's report of lies against the country's leaders.

"Our quarrel is only with the British media. Because we cannot act against the British media, we had to decide not to give contracts to British companies," he said. -- more

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Asked about an international news agency report that Malaysia was expected to withdraw the ban on British companies following the visit to Malaysia of British Trade Minister Richard Needham next month, Dr Mahathir said: "That (the visit) has nothing to do with it."

"They (their Education and Defence Ministers) have come since our ban on the contracts and there has been no change in our stand," he said.

"We have not broken off ties with the British government ... there have even been visits by our people (ministers) to Britain," he added. --

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