

PM reminds TV stations of their social responsibilities

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight reminded local television stations of their social and national responsibilities which should be placed above those of making profits.

If these responsibilities were neglected, he said, the Government might be forced to revoke their licences.

Dr Mahathir said television, besides providing entertainment, had been proven to be an effective tool in disseminating information.

He said this when launching the country's fourth television channel, MetroVision, at the Putra World Trade Centre.

The station is run by City Television Sdn Bhd. Also present were Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib and City Television chairman Tunku Abdullah Tuanku Abdul Rahman.

Dr Mahathir said the entry of MetroVision was good

for the local broadcasting industry as it provided viewers with more channels to choose from.

"But due to the increased competition, the trend will be towards the screening of programmes containing elements of sex and violence if the operators lose sight of their social responsibilities."

Dr Mahathir said a knowledgeable and educated society could be moulded if television stations screened programmes with positive elements.

"Unfortunately, human beings are more easily influenced by entertainment programmes aimed at pleasure. In order to maintain their popularity, television channels will opt for the easy way by airing programmes containing elements of sex and violence."

He urged the stations to provide a balanced presentation of entertainment and education programmes.

He said in the information age, television programmes could still be censored. With the advent of more modern equipment, viewers

would be able to receive hundreds of television channels from around the world.

Dr Mahathir warned that in the pursuit of profit, foreign broadcasters would resort to the screening of anything, resulting in viewers being influenced by lust and pleasure.

Besides measures taken by the Government to prevent unsuitable programmes from being aired, Dr Mahathir said the best defence was society's belief in positive values.

The Prime Minister said he was not calling for a total ban on entertainment programmes or for an extreme stand which overemphasised the preaching of morals.

Dr Mahathir said what should be done was to have a variety of programmes, including musicals and dramas which indirectly emphasised positive values.

He likened the problems of having television stations airing negative programmes to the time when printing machines were first introduced.

Dr Mahathir said at that

time, it was believed that governments would face difficulties if society became knowledgeable from reading books.

"But we know from history that lots of useful information could be obtained from books."

However, Dr Mahathir said the negative effect was the publication and distribution of pornographic materials, adding this was one of the reasons behind the West's moral decay.

Earlier in his speech, Tunku Abdullah claimed the authorities were practising double-standards in the censorship of programmes shown over RTM and those on TV3 and MetroVision.

He suggested that television stations be given the authority to do their own censorship with the Home Ministry providing the guidelines.

He said MetroVision would like to extend its transmission round-the-clock and called for some relaxation in the use of other languages such as English as it catered mostly to urban viewers.