

21 OCT 1996

Mahathir-Journalists

ROLE OF JOURNALISTS GETTING MORE CHALLENGING WITH ADVENT OF IT

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 21 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight the role of the media and journalists is getting more challenging with the advent of various sophisticated information technologies.

He said the country now had to face the freedom of the Internet which made the power of the media bigger and more comprehensive through various media that penetrated each family and individual.

He said that while the Internet was very useful in providing instant reports, it could also be used to disseminate pornographic writings and pictures not only to adults but also children.

Speaking at the 1996 Malaysian Journalist Award presentation at Hotel Istana, here, he said anyone could use the Internet to air their frustration by running down others which could damage the good relations between certain parties.

The prime minister said the vetting of news in the country was no longer effective because in this information age borders were no barrier to information dissemination.

He said : "If it cannot be done in the country, they disseminate abroad and in this way the media in the country feel threatened and want to control the same freedom so that they can compete with the foreign news."

In this respect, he called on the local journalists to reflect on the style of freedom of the media in the country to ensure the country's future progress.

"If we want to develop our country, if we want to compete with the developed countries, we must determine our own stance in whatever we do, including our attitude to freedom of the press," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the liberal society in the West was proud of their concept and principle of freedom to the extent that they did not see their own sanctions and violations of human rights.

He said that today they worship the freedom of the press but there were indications that no one in their society was comfortable with this freedom.

Citing western newspapers which often abused their freedom to boost sales, he gave the example of a newspaper which printed an article on a famous princess allegedly cavorting with her male companion, complete with pictures, which later turned out to be false.

No action was taken against that newspaper because although the matter could be taken to court, an open trial would focus more on the victim, he said.

He said journalists in the country realised all this. Although the influence of the local journalists was diluted somewhat by the foreign news influence, they still had a big role to play.

The prime minister said that Malaysia, as a democratic country, practised freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

"Many among us are fascinated with the variety of freedom but freedom has its limits,

"Journalists must reflect on these these matters that emerge in the information age. The influence of local journalists must be used for the good of everyone. The power of the pen is still there. The adage "the pen is mightier than the sword" is still true in this age." he said.

He said the country needed an ideal society that knew how to control itself and to adopt the good and reject the bad.

However, he said, there is no such thing as an ideal society anywhere and as such, all communities needed laws that somewhat curbed the freedom of their members.

The prime minister said: "This nation is still young, still fragile. We must be more cautious. The fascination with freedom will destroy us more than the nations that have already grown up." -- BERNAMA

-- BERNAMA

HT AHH JK