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Mahathir-Press

ACCURATE AND FACTUAL NEWS KEY TO GOOD TIES, SAYS MAHATHIR

PULAU PINANG, Nov 17 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said accurate and factual news reports are the key to good relations between peoples and countries and world progress.

While the media was in a very privileged position to do this, it was a pity that sensationalism and the bottom-line had led to distortions and inaccuracies, he said.

Because of this, the world was being deprived of a very important instrument for its own general good, he said when opening an international convention of Chinese newspapers here.

He said countries which claimed to have unrestricted freedom were either irresponsible or were just not telling the whole truth.

"They cannot be telling the whole truth because we know that what they report about us is far from being the truth," he said.

They frequently they did not report at all things that they did not like the world to know and things that they disagreed with, Dr Mahathir said.

Referring to foreign media reporting on Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said they would not hesitate to play up any negative issue about the country, its people or personalities but ignoring entirely anything that was good.

As such, he said, they would report about alleged excessive logging in the Malaysian forest, but the fact that Malaysia had maintained 50 per cent of its land surface covered by the original forest and 20 per cent more by tree plantations, had never been reported.

"Yet we know that in their countries, they do fell forests and there is hardly any of the original forest left, having been cleared for farm and human habitation," he said.

"We have to assume that if their report about us is wrong, inaccurate and biased, then their reports about other countries are also wrong, inaccurate and biased," he said.

They were biased against developing countries but favoured developed countries, the prime minister said.

In any case, their reports could not be trusted to form a basis for opinion of things, he said.

Dr Mahathir said a certain Western media when writing about Malaysia would automatically mention that the Malaysian press "is controlled".

"The fact that a number of these (Western) papers are actually printed in Malaysia and have never been censored by the government does not seem to be of any significance to these papers," he said.

It was sad they seemed incapable of being truthful, the prime minister said.

The International Herald Tribune and the Asian Wall Street Journal are two foreign newspapers which are printed in Malaysia for regional distribution.

"There is no such thing as absolute freedom and all freedom is limited because the exercise of unlimited freedom on the part of one would deprive or negate the freedom of another or indeed of the whole community," said Dr Mahathir.

He said elected governments had a duty to protect everyone from everyone else and if there seemed to be a restriction on anyone's freedom in Malaysia, it was meant to ensure the freedom of other people.

"We need freedom of the press because we think it is good for us.

Suppressing the truth must surely be bad for human society," Dr Mahathir said.

Unfortunately, he said, freedom of the press often denied the rights of non-journalists, particularly the subject of journalistic reports, from the freedom to state his case or to defend himself.

"In Malaysia, besides the minimal form of ensuring that the press was responsible and did not abuse the freedom by inciting racial intolerance and violence and pornography, the Malaysian press is free," he said.

He said Malaysia being a multi-racial society, had race riots before resulting in people being killed.

" While we cherish press freedom, we cherish our peace and stability and the lives of our people more," he said.

About 140 representatives from various Chinese-language presses from all over the world are attending the 30th International Chinese Newspaper Convention.

Carrying the theme "Press Technology - Its Development and Expectations and The future Role of the Chinese Press in South East Asia", it is jointly organised by the Hong Kong-based Chinese Language Press Institute and the Kwong Wah Yit Poh Press Bhd here.

The institute, established on 1968, has members throughout the world, mostly senior executives or chief executive officers of the various presses.

The objectives of the institute is to raise the standard of news reporting and editing and the level of production and forge closer links among Chinese language newspapers.-- BERNAMA

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