

17 APR 1997

Mahathir-Accuracy

MAHATHIR WARNS MEDIA NOT TO ABUSE ITS POWER

KUALA LUMPUR, April 17 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today warned the media that it will be doing a disservice to the people if it abuses and corrupts its power in the name of press freedom.

The Prime Minister said their subscribers paid them good money and actually supported their existence in order to get accurate reports and information to assist them in making decisions.

"Newspapers and the media often condemned governments for misuse of power and for abuse of power or corruption but is it not corruption and an abuse of power to do something you know very well is wrong simply because you the media have power," he said when opening the Kuala Lumpur Bureau of the Japanese financial newspaper "Nihon Keizai Shimbun" or widely known as Nikkei, here.

Dr Mahathir, who spoke off the cuff on press freedom and the importance of accurate reporting by the media, said there was really nothing to gain by contentious reporting and by passing remarks which were not based on any facts at all.

"Yes we do make mistakes in Malaysia, we sometime do wrong things here but they must be reported in the proper perspective. This is not only for our own good, it is also for the good of those who transact things with us as they need to have the right kind of information," he added.

Dr Mahathir said accuracy was very important because people would want to read more reports which were accurate and that which would serve the purpose of making decisions.

He said such reports were much better than those which were tendentious and merely satisfied the urge of some people to denigrate a developing country like Malaysia.

"Investors need to have information before they can invest. Traders need information before they can do any trade with any country. Any information is much more important of course if it is accurate," he said.

The Prime Minister said it was a very common practice of the media to publish sensational and negative reports as they apparently attracted more readers and subscribers than positive reports.

He said the media always highlighted the negative aspect of everything that it reported although it realised that there was a need for good and accurate reporting.

Dr Mahathir pointed out that it was actually a disturbance to the readers if the media were to report inaccurately or to report what the media would like to see happening rather than what was really happening.

For example, he said Malaysia had time and again been reported as a country which was about to break out into racial violence due to the "incompatibility" of its multi-racial, multi-language and multi-religious population.

"But yet Malaysia today is one country where we manage to live and work together to build this country. Malaysia's economic performance is actually the result of political stability in the country," he added.

The Prime Minister also dismissed allegations, especially by the West, that the government controlled the press in Malaysia.

"I would like to point out that those who said this have never bothered to read the vernacular papers which have nothing good to say about this government, at least some of them," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the kind of things that the media reported about him,

especially the newspapers controlled by opposition parties were sufficient for him to sue them for libel.

"But I will not sue them because I believe in press freedom. After all, what they say is not going to hurt me that much. So why should I bother to do anything which will only draw a lot of unfair criticism towards the government and towards me," he said, adding that there would be no such newspapers if there was no press freedom in Malaysia.

The Prime Minister however pointed out that press freedom must come with press responsibility because the government and the media had the role to ensure that the country remained stable.

"If you start stirring up racial hatred in a country which is multi-racial like Malaysia, you are going to damage this country, you are going to damage the majority of the people who do not want to see violence in this country," he said, adding that the media could protest but it should not disrupt the peace and harmony of the country.

On democracy, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had its own way of doing things.

"There are limits to everything and in Malaysia we believe that there also limits in democracy. If democracy can lead to anarchy, we should do something to correct it," he said. -- BERNAMA

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