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Muhammad not victim of media plot

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Veteran journalist Tan Sri A. Samad Ismail has described as completely unfounded allegations by certain quarters that the media had "conspired to bring about the downfall" of former Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib.

Speaking today at a roundtable conference of journalists and politicians sponsored by Institut Perkembangan Minda, he said that a monthly magazine had even claimed a "khalifah" who controls the mainstream media had orchestrated the conspiracy.

"The conspiracy theory apparently gained wide currency among certain circles especially in Selangor," said Samad.

Noting that the media has always been made the "scapegoat for the political misfortunes of people in high places", Samad said, "as far as I could observe the local media did not play the role of prosecutor against Muhammad. He was never put on trial by the media."

The former Menteri Besar is facing two charges at the Brisbane magistrate's court for failing to declare the equivalent of RM2.4 million while leaving the Brisbane International Airport for New Zealand on Dec 22 last year and for making a false declaration.

Muhammad's resignation was announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad after he chaired an Umno supreme council meeting on April 12.

Samad said Muhammad's court case in Brisbane was a major news event and the media merely gave the treatment it deserved, adding that he could detect no attempt to sensationalise the matter.

"The media had to give due space to the case as the events surrounding it.

He added that the media were in no position to come to Muhammad's defence for the simple reason that the case was a private matter between him and the Australian Government.

It was his duty to defend himself against charges by the Opposition and it was the media's responsibility to report and disseminate the news.

He said there was no hidden political agenda, adding that the media were simply fulfilling their function to keep the public informed.

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