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Mahathir-Media

PM ASKS LOCAL MEDIA TO BE IMPARTIAL AND AVOID EXTREME STANCE

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 6 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called on the local media to stick to the truth and not to take sides or adopt extreme positions.

The Prime Minister said it is important for the media to be impartial and avoid taking an extreme stance so that no one is victimised by negative media reports.

"I'm sad (if the media adopts such a position) because the media plays an important role in moulding the people's thinking. If the media focuses on something (negative) then the people too will also adopt such a thinking," he told reporters after recording his Hari Raya Puasa message at Angkasapuri here.

Also present were Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat and his deputy, Datuk Suleiman Mohamed.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on the increasing trend in the local media to expose certain problems and pass judgements against those it thinks are responsible for the problems.

He said those sections of the local media which adopt such positions probably have their own reasons for doing so.

"The media perhaps has its own agenda. Maybe the media has its loyalty to certain selected people. Or maybe it wants to promote certain people and bring down others," he said.

However, too strong a report against certain persons or parties makes it difficult for the individuals or the groups to restore their image after they have proven their innocence through the legal process, said Dr Mahathir.

"As said by Dr Goebel, the minister for propaganda in Nazi Germany, if something is repeated over and over again, the result is that it will be accepted (as the truth)," he said.

"So when we accuse someone of wrongdoing and write this and that, the people will finally accept that he is guilty, and if we want to restore (his image) when he is found to be innocent it becomes a very difficult task," he added.

The Prime Minister said he himself has received complaints that certain people are always getting good publicity in the local media, others are not getting any publicity, and yet others are getting bad publicity despite doing something which they feel is good for the nation.

"I think the media should stick to the truth. We need not side with anyone. What's good we should say it's good, and what's bad we say it's bad. We should not take extreme positions," he said.

Dr Mahathir acknowledged the media's role to expose the truth but said this should be done by highlighting true matters and not by just making accusations.

The Prime Minister was also asked to comment on the decision by a politician to seek a court order to stop the demolition of Stadium Merdeka on the ground that it is a historical building.

He described the move taken by S.Selvanathan, who contested and lost the Petaling Jaya Selatan seat in the 1995 general election, as the action of a person who is always going to the court to try to prevent anything that he does not like.

"Nothing that the government does or anyone else does is accepted 100 per cent by everybody," he said.

The government, he said, is aware that the stadium is the venue of various historic events but it is no longer practical to have a stadium right in the centre of Kuala Lumpur because it often causes traffic congestion.

On the proposal by the government to introduce national service for school leavers in an effort to overcome social ills among youths, Dr Mahathir said it may be restricted to youths identified as "hardcore" ones.

"We can't have national service throughout the country. Even now we have (limited) national service for doctors whereby they have to serve with the military for two or three years before working (elsewhere)," he said.

Asked if the proposal to introduce national service is made because the Rakan Muda programme has failed to overcome social problems, the Prime Minister said it has nothing to do with the performance of the programme.

He added that the implementation of the national service depends on a study to be carried out. -- BERNAMA

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