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Mahathir-media

BE FAIR, BALANCED AND FACTUAL, MAHATHIR TELLS MEDIA

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 26 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has asked the international media to be fair, balanced and factual in performing its global role as a powerful institution.

Saying he was not asking the media to report only the good things, Dr Mahathir said unfortunately the media itself was often tempted to misuse power.

To illustrate the point, the prime minister cited the case involving United States President Bill Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

"I am not a fan of President Bill Clinton but I do sympathise with him," he said when opening the Commonwealth Press Union (CPU) biennial conference here today.

"He only hugged Monica Lewinsky once, at least in public. He may have hugged her more times in private, that we don't have any pictures of.

"But that one hug has prefaced every report on President Clinton whether the subject matter had anything to do with his single instance or not," he said.

"If the CNN was to be believed Bill Clinton has hugged Monica a thousand times, twelve times a day ever since CNN resurrected that particular episode among the file pictures," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he felt the kind of presentation via television was not quite fair to Clinton and asked whether it was necessary to preface every mention of the name Clinton with his hugging of Lewinsky.

"How can anyone sit in judgement over him without being biased, without preconception? How can the impeachment of the President be fair and just?" he said.

He said Malaysia was experiencing something similar where the problem was made more serious by the manner it was being presented to the world by the all-powerful international media.

"Malaysia has never had a good press. None of the positive things we have achieved have been reported," he said.

He took to task the Western media for giving the impression to the world that Malaysia was in a state of perpetual turmoil and describing it as a police state "where police brutality was a daily, or even an hourly occurrence".

"And so, every time Malaysia appears on the T.V. screen for whatever reason, the pictures of rioting and the famous black eye are shown," he said in obvious reference to pictures of sacked Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim who was brought to court last month with a bruised eye.

Anwar has claimed trial to 10 charges of corruption and sexual misconduct. His supporters have been holding street demonstrations which Dr Mahathir had said was an attempt to overthrow the government.

The prime minister said pictures of armoured cars manned by African blacks were occasionally shown when reporting about the demonstrations without explaining how these Africans came to be driving armoured cars in Malaysia.

The viewers could not be blamed if they assumed that Malaysia was in Africa or Malaysia was in the habit of employing African mercenaries, he added.

Dr Mahathir said if the media must report on all those agitating

against the governments of the developing countries, they should at least give the government side a fair exposure as well.

"The media accuses the Malaysian Government and all those of other developing countries of controlling the press. But isn't the media doing the same.

"The international media never give the government side an airing. In fact they distort reports about the government and go so far as to fabricate unflattering stories about the government," he said.

The prime minister asked how the media could support the attempt to topple the government through undemocratic ways like street demonstrations while at the same time talk about democracy.

He said the media was also doing a disservice to their clients in making slanted and distorted reports.

This was especially so with economic reports and magazines as the analysis made was based usually on the agenda of the media concerned, he said.

"If it is not in favour of a country for whatever reason, disinformation is used to blight that country. Tourists and investors will then shun the country," he said.

At times as a result of this, he said the economy of the country failed, leading to instability and turmoil.

Urging the media to re-think its role and use its powers well, he said the media could promote a positive concept of neighbourliness in a shrinking world.

"It can help in the shaping of a new world culture, a culture of sharing, a culture that will make this global village of good caring neighbours. The media can help to bring about peace," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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