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Biased reporting only confirms Western media's hidden agenda

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JAPANESE journalists were invited by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to visit Malaysia and to see things for themselves. They were told not to blindly "trust CNN or CNBC".

The Prime Minister said: "I believe the Japanese people believe there is continuous rioting in Malaysia and it is a dangerous place to go to."

Dr Mahathir assured them that Malaysia was as safe as ever, arguing that "you cannot only come to Malaysia but you can do business there, you can invest there with legitimate profits".

"They (CNN and CNBC) have a different agenda and they tell lies to promote their agenda," he added.

This conclusion was evident when CNN, the Atlanta-based news organisation, filed its report on Dr Mahathir's speech at the Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD II).

The CNN news report, monitored in Tokyo, mentioned that Dr Mahathir had criticised its neighbours, making Indonesia and the Philippines as the target.

The CNN report said the criticism was in response to Philippine President Joseph Estrada's and Indonesian President B.J. Habibie's reported intentions not to attend the Apec summit in Kuala Lumpur next month.

The reports had apparently taken the Prime Minister's speech at TICAD out of context and drew their own conclusions. Even the BBC made the same conclusion.

The CNN report was based on Dr Mahathir's speech, in which he spoke of "widespread poverty and depression", adding "where before there was wealth and plenty, where before there was political and social stability, we see today extreme deprivation, turmoil and utter confusion.

"Governments which before had engineered miracles of economic development are now being overthrown and replaced with Governments which can do no better".

The Prime Minister had, in fact, merely stated a fact about current developments in the region.

There were no specific references and criticisms of any specific country. He did not single out Indonesia and the Philippines.

But CNN and CNBC reports in recent weeks had actually focused on the economic devastation in the region. Does CNN deny that there is "no widespread poverty and depression" in Southeast Asia and "the Philippines and Indonesia" - the two countries that it mentioned in its report?

People are dying. CNN's own reports have shown people resorting to desperate means to obtain food supplies. Eating cats and scavenging for food in the garbage heaps. Such negative portrayal of hardship would not help at all.

Since Dr Mahathir had not criticised the two countries, what then is the purpose of taking his speech out of context?

Was it to create more tension in the region? Was it to undermine the relationship between these countries so as to undermine Asean? Is there, then, not a hidden agenda in this whole exercise?

The Western media speak of being fair. Not only are they not being fair, they are also inaccurate and offer just one side of the story and argument.

When CNBC convened a panel discussion on media coverage of the "crisis in

Malaysia", they chose to be "unfair" and did not select any panel member from among the Malaysian media.

They had panelists from Singapore, Bangkok and Hong Kong. Yet the discussion focused on Malaysia. Is this not a clear case of deliberate bias?

The freedom of the Press that they profess should go hand in hand with accuracy. This is the least they can do.

But this does not seem to be the case as evidenced from their reports and commentaries.

They cannot blame anyone for concluding that they have an agenda. "They too are motivated by greed and the power they wield has corrupted them absolutely," Dr Mahathir said.

Before leaving for home, he told a Press conference that Malaysia had in the last year or so, and particularly in the last two months, "received fairly bad coverage".

In his opening remarks at the Press conference at the Japan National Press Club in Tokyo, Dr Mahathir said he welcomed the opportunity to explain the situation as "we do not seem to be able to do anything right".

He hoped the media would give him the same kind of treatment that they had given those who were against the Government. Press freedom should entail being "fair to both sides".

As much as the Government was expected to be fair to everyone, "the Press should also be fair to us and to those who are against us. In that way everyone will have the benefit of knowing the facts ... rather than slanted views".

Dr Mahathir told the Press conference that the "media has decided that the Government of Malaysia is bad, wrong and, on top of that, you have given the wrong evidence".

Citing an example, he said, images were repeated over and over again giving the impression that there were continuous riots in Malaysia.

Similarly, each time President Bill Clinton was mentioned, he was shown hugging (Monica) Lewinsky.

It would appear that Clinton was constantly hugging Lewinsky but that could have happened once.

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