

22/07/1998

Credible media a must: Anwar

Zainul Arifin in Washington

WASHINGTON, Tues: Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim described the recent resignations of newspaper editors as part of the normal changes in the industry.

Nevertheless, he said, while the editors may change, the media must continue to be credible, truthful and responsible in doing its job.

"As the Prime Minister had said, this is an on-going normal change.

"But to my mind what is more important is that the media must remain credible and objective and must continue to play its role in disseminating information and truth."

He was responding to questions from reporters on reports in the foreign media that the editors who resigned, believed to be aligned with him, were indeed "fired" and that their removals could be seen as a direct attack on him.

Over the last week the editors of Berita Harian and Utusan Malaysia, Datuk A. Nazri Abdullah and Datuk Johan Jaafar had resigned from their posts.

"(The media doing its job) is more critical than the (speculation)," he told reporters here on Monday at the end of his two-day trip to the city that included several meetings with officials from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Anwar was also asked on speculation that there were differences between him and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir in the handling of the current economic problems, which could be a stumbling block to the implementation of several policies for recovery. The "differences" were said to have caused concern among foreign investors.

He said the Prime Minister and him complement each other, and that any differences in the ways to spur recovery were merely "perceived differences".

"The policies are discussed in the Cabinet and the National Economic Advisory Committee, so there are no policy differences.

He said differences were perceived as the Prime Minister was articulating the concerns of the business community as well as many economies in the developing world on the effect of liberalisation, and the failure of the international community to protect the poorer countries.

"These are considerations I share. But you must be able to differentiate between the general political concerns and actual policy programmes to be implemented. Because of the different roles (between the two) you will see perceived differences."

He said the statements that he made were usually tied to the general policies coordinated by the Treasury, that Malaysia was expected to implement.

For example, on the issue of interest rates, Anwar said he shared Dr Mahathir's view that should be low as a mean to stimulate economic activities.

"I am supportive of a lower interest rates policy. But we are dictated by the circumstances at present - the issue of inflation, (currency) speculation, offshore interest rates of the ringgit - and these issues affect policies."

A higher interest rate is generally believed to be good for the ringgit as it could stem outflow of domestic fund, and that in turn could help ease imported inflation.

The Government is now trying to strike a balance between the need for a tight monetary policy and the need to ease interest rates.

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