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Dr M: News agencies need to report the truth

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - International news agencies will be doing their clients worldwide a disservice if they failed to report the truth, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

This was especially true for their business clients who need correct information to make decisions.

Dr Mahathir said if the information available to these people was incorrect, there was a chance they would make wrong decisions on investments.

"Business people read (news) and watch television because they want to know what is happening around the world.

"They do so because they have to make decisions like whether to invest or pull out and when they get wrong information, chances are their decision will also be wrong and will not benefit their companies and businesses," he said at the opening of Reuters Malaysia Sdn Bhd's new office at Petronas Twin Towers. (See Page 5)

Dr Mahathir said he appreciated the services provided by the few news agencies which continued to report the facts and not invent them merely because they wanted to be popular.

He praised Reuters as one of the former, adding that he hoped it would not deflect from this path merely to get more clients or a bigger audience.

The Prime Minister said someone had once commented to him that commercialisation had spoiled the media.

"Over the years, there has been more competition, with new people moving into this field. With the (players) having to do certain things in order to get more audience and clients, we see today much more sensationalisation of news." He said it was hoped information technology would make people more knowledgeable, but unfortunately "many people could not get the real news".

Elaborating, he said Malaysians were sceptical of news reports about certain things in other countries as they knew the reports were far from the truth.

"If they can lie about our country, we can safely assume they are also telling lies about other countries. We cannot make decisions based on that."

Dr Mahathir also praised Reuters for being accorded Multimedia Super Corridor status, saying that both sides would benefit from the partnership. He said the MSC was expected to progress rapidly.

Jeremy Penn, Reuters Asia managing director, said they had spent RM4.5 million on the new office and a new technical distribution centre using diversified international fibre optics, satellite links and facilities for automation and remote monitoring to service its 600 clients in Malaysia.

He said Reuters, which was granted MSC status in June, had identified about RM20 million worth of new MSC projects to be carried out over five years.

Penn said Reuters' strength in supplying global news and information would be complemented by its ability to provide domestic market coverage in Bahasa Malaysia and English.

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