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Dr M: Locals and foreigners treated equally under Malaysian law

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Locals and foreigners who break the laws of the land are treated equally and without prejudices, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia's laws applied to both locals and foreigners and that they should be respected by all.

Answering questions from the floor at the 22nd Commonwealth Press Union Biennial Conference at the Shangri-La Hotel, Dr Mahathir said he was sorry that former consultant of Realmild Sdn Bhd Dr Munawar Anees who is Pakistani was jailed for committing an offence under Malaysian laws.

Dr Mahathir was responding to a question from the secretary-general of the Pakistan Press Foundation Owais Aslam Ali who expressed concern over the arrest and conviction of Dr Munawar.

Dr Munawar who pleaded guilty to a charge of committing an act of gross indecency by allowing sacked Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to sodomise him, was sentenced to six months jail by the Sessions Court on Sept 19.

He committed the offence at Anwar's private residence at No 8, Jalan Setia Murni 1, Bukit Damansara in March 1993.

Dr Mahathir said Munawar was only sentenced by the court after he had, on his own free will, pleaded guilty.

"I am sorry that he is a Pakistani, but he was in this country and so he has to be treated equally."

Dr Mahathir said when two Australians and a British resident were found guilty of drug trafficking, they were sentenced to death despite appeals from many foreign interest groups.

He said locals were also sentenced to death for drug trafficking.

Dr Mahathir said the Malaysian judiciary was fair and free from any kind of government influence.

This was reflective in its 1988 decision declaring Umno, the principal party in the Barisan Nasional coalition, illegal.

To another question from the editor-in-chief of Post Newspapers Ltd of Zambia Fred M'membe whether the Government's role in licensing the media organisation in Malaysia restricted Press freedom, Dr Mahathir said licensing was necessary so that the Government could step in if the Press abused its power to an extent where matters were out of control.

He said this was because the Government was obligated to ensure that the people did not suffer in any way as a result of the media's abuse of power.

To a question from editor of Gibraltar Chronicle Dominique Searle on how much the Government was committed to Press freedom, Dr Mahathir said the Government believed in Press freedom.

"However, more often than not the people who were opposed to the Government got more Press coverage. Even when the Government's views are aired, they are negated by unfair comments.

"The Government is elected by the people, therefore it has to maintain communication with the people," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia believed in Press freedom with responsibility.

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