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Negative reporting can undermine confidence (HL)

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BANGI, Sat. - Malaysians may develop an inferiority complex if the local media persists in publishing negative reports on the country.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that he feared the trend, if prevalent, would undermine long-standing efforts to strengthen the character of Malaysians.

"It will be counter-productive to national development and the mental well-being of the people," Dr Mahathir told reporters after opening Sri Utusan - Utusan Melayu (Malaysia) Bhd's RM110 million printing complex in Bandar Baru Bangi.

He was asked to elaborate on his speech in which he said some segments of the local media deliberately highlighted negative reports.

"Negative reports will make Malaysians feel inferior as they are given the impression that others are better than they. In fact, others are worse, but we choose not to report it," he said.

Asked to name the media, Dr Mahathir said: "There are some media which do so, but I cannot pinpoint them. But all of them sometimes carry reports which are baseless."

Dr Mahathir said when newspapers were founded, they were very nationalistic and played an important role in helping the country achieve independence.

"But now, it seems that if we say something positive about the Government, it is as if we are committing a crime.

"So, to be credible, you must constantly condemn the Government, condemn the establishment and condemn the country," he said.

Dr Mahathir said recent reports by the foreign Press that there was a Government clampdown on the local media were baseless and unfounded.

He added that the resignation of the Utusan Melayu Group's editor-in-chief Datuk Johan Jaaffar on Tuesday was not due to political pressure as reported by the foreign Press (see also Page 2).

"There is no political pressure. Even when he came (to Utusan Melayu), people said it was due to political pressure. Editors come and go.

"These are the kind of things that they (the foreign Press) will say. What they say doesn't matter to us, but what our media says matters," he added.

Dr Mahathir said although foreigners claimed that the local media was controlled by the Government, the local Press often criticised the Government, sometimes more than the foreign Press.

Earlier in his speech, Dr Mahathir said the local media should not imitate its Western counterpart.

He said Western media reports were only aimed at attracting readers and gave no consideration to the implications on society.

"In the West, news reports are written without any consideration of morality and the implications on society but only aim to make the writers and newspapers popular. Many newspapers in the West sensationalise stories with elements of sex and violence."

Unfortunately, he said, the local media seemed to be influenced by them.

The Prime Minister said there was no doubt that the Press had a very strong influence on society. However, he said, some newspapers abused this power for certain reasons to the extent that society ended up in chaos.

"Actually, we need not imitate others because they (the West) are developed and disturbances will not destroy their nation.

"Instead, as a developing country, Malaysia needs everyone's efforts to ensure progress in the country."

He said the Press could use its power and influence to benefit the country.

"We don't want the Press to be covering up events that really happened but coverage should also be balanced with reports that enhance the image of the country."

Dr Mahathir said future training of new reporters should focus on their responsibility to society besides making a name for themselves.

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