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PM upset over local Press for publishing negative reports

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he was upset with the local newspapers for publishing negative reports instead of helping the Government to resolve problems.

Speaking at the presentation of excellent service awards for the Prime Minister's Department employees at Pusat Islam today, Dr Mahathir said the newspapers in the country seldom helped the Government.

"They are more keen to criticise the Government. If we were to say something, they reported it in a negative manner.

"I am very upset because the newspapers should be helping us to resolve problems, but they are more inclined to sell their products and publish negative reports on everything."

The Prime Minister cited the opening of the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang as an example, where the problems that cropped up were exaggerated. He said there were airports in the United States which, when opened, could not function at all.

"You could not even collect the baggage as they went missing," the Prime Minister added.

Dr Mahathir said when it happened in this country, they played up the stories.

However, the successes achieved were hardly given any publicity, the Prime Minister said, adding that this did not help in the economic recovery.

Dr Mahathir also said when the Government established a fund to assist traders, they (the newspapers) asked whether it was only to assist certain people.

"It appears as if when the Government established a fund worth billions of ringgit, it is only to help one particular person."

Later when asked by reporters whether the Government would cut salaries of its employees if the economic situation did not improve, Dr Mahathir said: "Maybe ... if the Press does not co-operate."

Asked to comment on the use of the RM5 billion Infrastructure Development Fund to finance the construction of infrastructure projects in the Multimedia Super Corridor, he said the fund was not solely for MSC.

"We need to provide the fund because we need the infrastructure and also because of the spin-off effect from this economic activity to 140 other industries."

Dr Mahathir said the projects included the construction of roads, provision of water and electricity supply and other infrastructure projects that had been approved but did not have the funds.

Asked whether the State Government would be encouraged to spend on infrastructure projects, he said they could do so if they had the funds.

The Prime Minister was also asked whether there would be stiff competition for money following the setting up of the various funds.

"We will get the funds locally and abroad. We will borrow from abroad either from other countries or from the market."

On Tun Abdul Ghafar Baba's position as MP for Jasin after he had been declared bankrupt by the High Court on Tuesday, Dr Mahathir said he did not know the exact situation yet.

Ghafar and his son Mohamad Tamrin had been declared bankrupt by the High Court over a RM2.4 million owing to a businessman.

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