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Disallow dissemination of distorted, misleading news

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THE article "Foreign Press ignored principles" (NST, March 15) suggests that we examine the role of the foreign Press, especially the news agencies, in our society.

Many important events and issues are distorted because of irresponsible reporting.

Your article highlights the gravity of the situation which has reached the high watermark of defamation of our nation.

The traditional news agencies, like Reuters, AFP and AP, are leading in this field and damaging Malaysia's image abroad.

The individual writer or reporter is the willing instrument distorting facts and acting on behalf of those who write the cheques for their services.

We understand that for the foreign media a well written sober comment on Malaysia will not do. Anyone who sticks to the bare truth will face the possibility of being driven out of the market.

This "New Sensationalism" about Malaysia has been brought about by the same forces that attacked the Malaysian currency and economy at large.

Distortions about the Sabah elections, as mentioned in your article, amount to slander and call for public retraction.

As readers of newspapers in foreign countries cannot distinguish unconventional but clean news from "crank" reporting, we should not allow misleading news to be disseminated in the first place.

The Malaysian Government has an open and tolerant attitude towards critics but not so in Singapore.

Over there, stern action prevents the mischievous from damaging the image of the Republic. In Malaysia, this happens daily and it goes unpunished.

The traditional ethics of news reporting seem to have disappeared for good, so too the watchdog function of the Press.

The watchdog is now behaving like "the Hounds of Baskerville". Instead of high quality servings of food for thought, the public gets "junk food".

As our papers are filled with news agency reports, we can hardly change our diet unless the authorities brand those responsible as persona non grata. Institutions should also face the same outcome; in fact, they should have been asked to close shop a long time ago.

Reality prevents us from being naive in thinking that reporters are concerned about being impartial, especially when they have partisan affiliations.

A reporter from Reuters promoted the State election in Sabah as being a close shave for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, making it appear as if it were a general election.

That the state election focused on local issues and problems and had no relation to national well-being was absolutely irrelevant.

Other agency reports show the same bias and targeted inaccuracies, focusing on the Prime Minister as if his life was on the line.

This message of political uncertainty will reach rating agencies, leading financial institutions as well as the public worldwide since almost one billion readers of the various publications are spoonfed by Reuters and aligned agencies.

As there are no guaranteed remedies to avoid slander and no chance of depending on the responsibility and integrity of writers or agencies, we

have to follow in principle the measure taken by the Malacca Government which is closing down 200 pig farms to prevent further contamination of the environment and to avoid the spread of Japanese Encephalitis.