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Dr M on the proposed CNBC debate

GURUN, Mon. - With acting Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein all psyched up to face his detractors in a CNBC debate, the Prime Minister explained that political problems had to go to that level because the Opposition had "internationalised" it.

Asked by reporters whether it was a good idea to air political problems on an international network, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the fact was that somebody was internationalising the problems, mainly the opposition.

"They are telling a lot of lies," he told a Press conference after launching the Modenas Jaguh, the second national motorcycle at the plant here, "so we have to counter it in anyway we can, even if it is through the international media."

Hishammuddin was miffed at the accusation by Pas Youth Leader Mahfuz Omar that the members of the late Tun Abdul Razak's family were "cowards" for being unwilling to accept his challenge to a debate.

Nevertheless, Hishammuddin turned the issue around, challenging Mahfuz to a debate on CNBC and urging the latter not to come out with excuses to avoid it.

However, Dr Mahathir outlined the pre-requisites before such a debate could take place.

"If there is going to be a debate, it should be a neutral party presiding, not somebody who is biased," he said. "When our people, in all honesty, went to the universities to participate in a debate, the hall was packed with their supporters and they did not give a chance for our people to speak...they just booed to show their strength and how much they hate the Government."

Reminding the Opposition that the Government could apply the same tactics, Dr Mahathir nevertheless did not favour such a move because "this is not the way to settle problems."

"Okay, we agreed to a neutral forum, CNBC for example...let's hear what they say, see whether they are brave enough."

When asked whether he was inclined to challenge a similar debate, he said he was not.

"I'm not in favour of debating with them," he said.

"They can hear me everyday. If they want to reply, they can reply...no problem."

Asked about Opposition claims that the local media, especially TV3, was spreading falsehood, Dr Mahathir dismissed the accusations.

The local media, he said, had no tendency to spread falsehood because it was easy to expose.

"However, if the international media reported something untrue, their viewers or readers may not know whether it is true or false.

"This is even when the news is not true," he said.

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