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MAHATHIR-INVESTORS

INCORRECT REPORTS HALT FOREIGN INVESTORS, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, June 22 (Bernama) -- Many foreign investors missed out on profitable investments in Malaysia due to the distorted and incorrect information they received through media reports, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said that since September last year, when the distorted reports about Malaysia were being spread by the media, the Malaysian stock market index rose by almost 200 percent.

"Literally, this means investors who came in early would have made huge capital gains. But they did not because of the incorrect information that they had received through the media," he said in his opening speech at the Worldwide Partners' 1999 annual world meeting here today.

Worldwide is the largest network of independent and owner-managed advertising agencies.

Dr Mahathir thanked Worldwide for assisting its partner agency here, ISCB (Integrated Strategic Communications Bullseye), to undertake its "Malaysia: Bullish on Bouncing Back" international campaign last year to try halt the sliding confidence in Malaysia's ability to recover economically.

He said as a medical doctor, he never doubted for even one moment Malaysia's and Asia's ability to recover from the so-called "Asian Flu."

"And I would like to report that Malaysia is indeed bouncing back very strongly."

On advertising, he said it was absolutely necessary for the rapid growth of an economy.

While the advertising industry in most countries is self-regulating, "quick gains cannot be the objective of regulating," Dr Mahathir said.

"In short, advertising, as well as freedom of the press, since both are members of the communications industry, are at various stages of development in different countries, and need some monitoring or policing by self or in some case by those authorised by people," he noted.

Dr Mahathir said that the suppliers of news and the promises made in the course of advertising are no different from other suppliers of goods and services.

They must be careful of what they help to promote and not to mislead consumers, he said.

"Today, product liability is something that we all take seriously," the prime minister added.

He cited an example where Cessna ceased producing single-engined aircraft because any defect in the aircraft found 20 years after usage could still result in the company being sued or blamed.

"But when news agencies sell their news report to their clients, readers and viewers, shouldn't they be made equally responsible for the products they sell,?" he asked.

"If their distorted and inaccurate news results in wrong decisions being made and losses incurred due to missed opportunities, shouldn't the news agencies, the media be held responsible for their products, namely the news they broadcast to people who are their clients,?"

Dr Mahathir said: "We live in an age of literate and educated consumers. We cannot afford to take them for a ride to diddle them. We must therefore be more careful about everything that we do or say."

Meanwhile, chairman of US-based Worldwide Partners, Inc Michael D.

Gallivan told reporters that initially, they were concerned about having the meeting here due to reports of unrest and demonstrations in the region.

However, he said the organisation sent a representative to view the situation here and obtained a positive feedback.

Thus the decision to go ahead with the meeting here, he said.

Worldwide Partners, formed in 1938, has partner agencies in 90 countries. -- BERNAMA

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