

25 JUL 1999
LID-Media
LEADERS TRADE PLACES WITH JOURNALISTS

LANGKAWI, July 25 (Bernama) -- A unique situation was created at the fourth Langkawi International Dialogue here when cameramen and photographers zoomed their lenses on their colleagues as leaders of developing countries turned the tables on journalists by "grilling" them at a special session today.

The leaders, who are always at the receiving end from the press, were only too glad to trade places with the media and fired questions at local and foreign journalists causing some to "squirm."

"As former victims, we enjoyed it very much because some of you are not comfortable, just as how we feel when you ask difficult questions. We are very sympathetic with you all," Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said to laughter from those present.

The special session, reportedly the first of its kind in the world, was set up to discuss whether the government and the media could forge a smart partnership in line with the popular credo which has become synonymous with LID.

It turned out to be a fruitful and sometimes amusing session on how the media could also be smart partners with the government.

Among other things, Dr Mahathir called on the media "not to be too rigid in their watchdog role as after all, both can prosper if they can work with each other."

The session, moderated by Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali, started off with Dr Mahathir asking what the media think of smart partnership and prosper thy neighbour concept.

After a momentary silence, New Straits Times Group Editor-in-Chief Datuk Abdul Kadir Jasin replied with wit and humour when he said: "If I have the chance, I would answer that I have no comments. (That) you are not asking the correct question." This brought roaring laughter from all present.

On a serious note however, he said that smart partnership has positive results bringing together people who normally do not get together and discussing things not normally discussed together.

Sudanese President Lt Gen Omar Hassan Ahmad asked: "Why does the press only write bad news about Sudan. Has anybody heard any good news about Sudan?"

Sin Chew Jit Poh chief news editor Liew Hing Chang replied: "We only get news from foreign wires; we have no good news about Sudan except disasters."

Dr Mahathir asked: "Are the journalists independent from their owners?"

Itai Masuku, a senior business reporter with Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, said: "Journalists want to be independent but they have a code of ethics to follow."

Chris Greene, BBC's Managing Editor for World Service, Southeast Asia and the Pacific region, said: "It's a question of responsibility."

Namibian President Dr Sam Nujomo asked: "How can the media play a role in working with the government in poverty eradication?"

The Star business editor Wong Sulong said: "Media can play their role by publishing success stories on how other countries have tackled the problem."

The discussions also took a dig at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which is supposed to help developing countries but was acting to the

contrary when it unloaded gold in the market, jeopardising the economies of African countries which are gold producers.

New Straits Times Press Editor-at-Large Hardev Kaur said gold producers should perhaps consider emulating Malaysia which formed the Association of Tin Producing Countries (ATPC) to stabilise world tin prices.

"If producer countries from developing economies do not do something for themselves, no one will and certainly not the developed countries and not the IMF."

African journalist Qwahe Mawba, the director of the Broadcasting Unit of Swaziland Television, called for a new world communication order for dissemination of facts on Africa in view that much of the news that comes from the continent was all bad news.

-- BERNAMA

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