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Local media has not 'lost watchdog role'

JITRA, Tues. - The local media has not lost its role as the watchdog of society although it may be more inclined to support the Government, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said this was because the local media continued to criticise the Government when it was necessary.

"Some of the newspapers may be more inclined in supporting the Government but they are also critical.

"They are critical when it is necessary...not to the extent of (saying) everything the Government does is wrong," he said, adding that if this happened the media would lose its credibility.

Citing Pas newspaper Harakah as example, Dr Mahathir said the paper had no credibility because its reports condemned the Government for everything it did.

"The paper has no credibility," he said when asked if the media's role as watchdog of society would be affected if their reports were pro-Government.

The Prime Minister was speaking to reporters after visiting Kampung Kubang Pasu near here.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Kubang Pasu Member of Parliament, was at the operation centre at the village as part of his regular visit to his constituency.

Asked how the credibility of local media would be affected because of its tendency to be inclined towards one political party or the other, Dr Mahathir said it was normal for the media to choose who it wanted to support.

He said even in Britain, some newspapers supported the Conservative party while other the Labour party.

"It's a free country, we also have media which don't support the Government.

"Some newspapers pick up issues like the South Indian Labour Fund and say the Government doesn't care about the people although this is not true...but this shows in Malaysia we have freedom of the Press."

Later, speaking at a Press conference at the Sultan Abdul Halim airport in Kepala Batas at the end of his two day official visit to Kedah, Dr Mahathir said Pas' claims that it could wrest control of a few states in the coming general election was just an old story repeated by the opposition party during every election.

Asked to comment on his frequent usage of the word 'merayu' (appeal) when giving speeches during his visit here, Dr Mahathir said he used the word because:

"We always appeal...we cannot direct people or try to incite them.

"We try to influence people truthfully by appealing to them;

Dr Mahathir said some people were confused, became too emotional and closed their minds to everything while there were others who could still listen.

"To them we appeal...it is not wrong to appeal."

Asked if Barisan Nasional was worried about the "people's confusion", Dr Mahathir said "this is not about getting worried."

He said it was the Government's responsibility to win over people who had been led astray, especially through lies told by opposition parties.

On his repeated reminders asking the people to be thankful and grateful

for what they had, Dr Mahathir said this was because some people, especially students, university lecturers and professionals forget they are enjoying what they had because of the Government.

"They are told by Pas leaders to be thankful only to God."

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