

29 JUN 1999

Mahathir-Media

MAHATHIR DEFENDS LOCAL NEWSPAPERS, SLAMS WESTERN MEDIA

PUTRAJAYA, June 29 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today defended some local newspapers for their pro-government stance, saying that the people behind them believe in the system and policies of the government.

He singled out the local English newspapers as being pro-government.

"This is normal. People support certain ideologies. So, they write in support of us," the prime minister told 18 African journalists who called on him at his office here.

Dr Mahathir said this when the visitors asked the prime minister about allegations of lack of press freedom in Malaysia.

Denying such allegations, he said that on the contrary, local vernacular newspapers have been highly critical of the government.

"The media here (in Malaysia) is free so much so that we have a hard time with those who write nasty things," he said.

He said certain Chinese, Tamil and Malay newspapers have been anti-government.

At the recent Umno general assembly, delegates slammed opposition newspaper Harakah and official organ of PAS for false reports about the government and the country.

Dr Mahathir said it was the western media which reported negatively about the country in order to sabotage the government.

Citing an example, he said following western media reports of riots in Kuala Lumpur, thousands of tourists cancelled their trip to Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir also denied allegations that the local media had not been accommodating enough to opposition parties to voice their views.

"But of course they (opposition) have full support of the western media," he said.

He said while the western media openly supported and gave wide coverage for opposition views and allegations, they would not publish government clarifications on the allegations.

"So, it is only fair that we get some support from the local media," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was not logical to say that the government suppressed the local media.

"We value the press but they have to be fair not only to the opposition but also to the government," he said.

The prime minister also commended the local media for being responsible by not reporting matters which could stir up racial hatred.

-- BERNAMA

ES RYN