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`Second Mahathir' is clearly different man

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - A picture, as they say, speaks a thousand words.

But when a Bernama photograph of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad being greeted by a crowd in Kangar was published on the front page of Berita Minggu on Nov 28, the Pas newsletter, Harakah, apparently saw more than just a picture or a thousand words. It saw two Mahathirs and an opportunity to lambast others.

Harakah, in its issue of last Monday, claimed there were two Mahathirs in the picture which it reproduced with the headline: "How many Mahathirs can you spot here?"

It went on to suggest that the picture had been doctored to boost the crowd size and popularity of the Prime Minister.

Well, the opposition party newsletter is not only having vision problems, it has shot itself in the foot.

Bernama's investigation has shown conclusively there is only one Mahathir and the scene in the photograph was genuine.

A close-up of the photograph released by Bernama showed that the "second Mahathir" is clearly a different man in a dark-coloured shirt, wearing sunglasses, with a moustache and not wearing the garland.

Bernama acting general manager/Editor-in-Chief Syed Jamil Syed Jaafar has since issued a statement denying the accusation.

The picture was taken by a Bernama photographer in Perlis and wired over to the Bernama headquarters shortly after the event. The headquarters received the picture at 6pm and made it available to all its clients via electronic transmission within 20 minutes. Syed Jamil has denied any tampering or doctoring.

Harakah, unaware that it was a Bernama picture, had earlier laid the blame squarely on Berita Minggu and demanded that New Straits Times Group Editor-in-Chief Datuk A. Kadir Jasin make an apology "if you have any ethics left."

But it looks like Harakah may itself have to think of apologising to its readers for misleading them.

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's dean of the Mass Communications Faculty, Dr Ahmad Redzuan Abd Rahman, said Harakah should have checked its facts before making the allegation.

"It has done this before. It has been guilty of misreporting," he said.

"Bernama would not lower its standards," Ahmad Redzuan said, adding that Harakah was not "clean" and that it had slanted news before.

Veteran politician and lawyer, Datuk Rais Yatim, said Harakah tended to sensationalise and publish news reports that were baseless.

"If they continue like this, the paper will become a ridiculous news corner," Rais said.

He said he was concerned that Harakah had become more like a "mainstream paper."

"Why is the Home Ministry not asking Harakah to stick to its role as a party paper? This is a ridiculous situation," Rais maintained.

Malaysian Youth Council president Saifuddin Abdullah said the movement was saddened by Harakah's reporting which reflected a low standard of professionalism.

He said newspapers have to ensure accurate reporting so that readers are not confused. "In this case I question Harakah's motive," he said.

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