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`Foreign media must change'

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SHAH ALAM, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today told the international media moguls to discard the mistaken notion that they had the monopoly of wisdom, arguing that what coloured their reports were blatant lack of knowledge, racism and arrogance.

The Prime Minister, expressing regret that the international media was so negative, hoped that they could reform themselves for the benefit of the global community.

He said the "few good men" among them should assert themselves and re-examine the role of the media with the aim of improving quality and to look beyond its immediate need to sell for money.

"For the European journalists, learn to be humble, stop assuming that you know better than non-whites about how to run countries and administer justice.

"Stop being arrogant and assuming that you know everything because that is far from the truth. Stop being racists. Be human and humane and the world will thank you for contributing to the new civilisation that should be the mark of the 21st Century," Dr Mahathir said when opening the International Convention on the Role of the Media in Non-Aligned Countries.

The two-day convention is organised by the Non-Aligned Students and Youth Organisation East Asia Regional Centre, the Association of Malay Journalists and the Selangor Government.

The event, being attended by some 400 local and foreign media practitioners, will see the presentation of seven working papers on the role of the media in non-aligned countries.

Citing Malaysia's financial crisis and the subsequent Government measures to prevent manipulative attacks by currency manipulators as an example, Dr Mahathir said the international media refused to admit that they were wrong.

He said this was despite the admission by international organisations like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund that currency speculation was responsible for the crisis.

Dr Mahathir said that when it was pointed out that the currency traders had caused currencies to depreciate to enable them to make profits, the Press supported the speculators.

"It was not the Government which was in denial. It was the Press which was frozen in a state of denial," he said, rebutting earlier claims by the international media that those who attributed the crisis to currency speculators were economic illiterate and in a "state of denial".

"When Malaysia implemented its own plan to turn around the economy, it was thoroughly condemned by the Press for imposing capital control. It was told that its economy would collapse totally.

"Even when it didn't, even when the economy made a fast recovery it was reported that the recovery was not real or was inferior in some mysterious ways to the recovery of IMF-aided countries."

Dr Mahathir said in actual fact, the Press did not know what was done in Malaysia, did not even know what was meant by selective capital control.

"The Press did not want to find out for fear of having to admit mistakes," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Press continued to claim that capital control was bad but could not explain why.

"Of course they cannot explain their premonitions as they don't even know what Malaysia had done."

The Prime Minister said far from affecting Malaysia's share trading, the 12-month control over short-term speculative capital had resulted in the highest share market recovery in East Asia with the stock market going up from 262 to nearly 1,000 points at one time.

"Those who invested in the shares, including foreigners who were not allowed to liquidate their investments, made almost 300 per cent capital gains," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that if the Press could do research and listen to other views, they could do the world a great favour and help with all-round economic recovery simply by revealing the truth.

He said: "It is not right for reports about Malaysia to be qualified with 'where the media is censored'. But it is right to make a factual report on the censorship of the Press in Malaysia giving real evidence of this."

He said responsibility was something that the Press must impose on itself, taking into account the good of the community, the nation or international relations.

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