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Mahathir-Media

GET NEWS REPORTS DIRECT FROM SOURCE, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, June 30 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Muslim countries should get news reports from each other for a clear picture of what is happening in the Muslim world.

He said they should not depend on western news agencies whose reports were mostly biased.

"If we don't have any faith in our own news agencies, we tend to publish what is distributed by the western wire services, as a result we don't get at least an alternative view," he said during a dialogue at an international seminar on enhancing understanding of Islam for the media.

The three-day seminar is being held at Ikim or the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia, here.

Dr Mahathir said since the western media have their own agenda and only report what befit their agenda, Muslim countries should use of the services of national news agencies of their fellow nations.

The prime minister called for the revival of the International Muslim News Agency (IMNA) and for all Muslim countries to subscribe to the agency to ensure its success.

The seminar and dialogue aimed at correcting the distorted image of Islam by the foreign and local media and at enhancing the understanding of Islam and Muslims within the news media community.

Representatives of media agencies, including La Vie (Paris), The Australian, International Herald Tribune, Die Woche (Germany), United Press International, Financial Times and Asiaweek are taking part in the seminar.

Earlier in his address, Dr Mahathir said there were many instances of the media being unfair and discriminatory against Islam and they have made Islam a religion that was misunderstood and reviled by non-Muslims for no very good reason.

He said an example of media discrimination against Islam was stereotyping and labelling terrorism being linked to the religion.

Whereas, the prime minister said, non-Muslims involved in terrorism were not linked to their religious beliefs even though they were perpetrated in the name and in furtherance of the interest of the particular religion.

Dr Mahathir said the media had the greatest opportunity to correct the misinformation and wrong perception of Islam and contribute towards greater understanding between Muslims and the followers of other religions.

By doing so, they could bring about greater harmony and peace to the world.

"I will admit that we Muslims are also to be blamed for the bad image that we have. There are among us people who act deliberately to cause Islam to be reviled by others. They do this in the name of Islam. But what they do is not Islamic," he said.

The prime minister said the Muslims were ready to correct the bad image but they needed cooperation from the media, particularly the Western media.

"If one looks around, one would see that everywhere the Muslims are oppressed, are being ejected from their own lands, are in fact the modern diaspora," he said.

The stories of these people who needed to be sympathised with and to be protected, had to be told, but instead they were generally accused of oppression and deserving the sad fate which befell them, he said.

"While terrorists of Muslim faith are called Muslim terrorists, no one

talks of Muslims who have been oppressed, massacred and expelled from their homeland as Muslim victims," he said.

The prime minister said Muslims who were oppressed, sometimes fought back ferociously in desperation and committed acts of terror but they were not the only ones doing that out of anger and frustration.

"Can their stories not be told factually, without bias, without the usual condemnation? Can the reasons for their apparent cruel act not be told? Can there not be a description also of the way they were terrorised, their oppression by their enemies, their tormentors?" he said.

Terrorism, he said, was not a Muslim invention but they learnt it from the non-Muslims.

Dr Mahathir said the Muslims were not asking for the media to be biased in their favour but for fair reporting and at the very least, after a biased or unfavourable report against them, they should be given an opportunity to be heard, to give their side of the story.

"The media is powerful. When they act together they are even more powerful. And power as we all know corrupts. The almost absolute power of the Western media corrupts almost absolutely," he said.

He said the media had a big role in the development of a village culture where Muslims and non-Muslims live and work together and share the fruits of their labour together fairly and equitably.

-- BERNAMA

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