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Parliament-Mahathir (Media)

LIES SHOW THAT GOVT HAS NO CONTROL OVER THE MEDIA, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 11 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told the Dewan Rakyat today that the fact that so many newspapers in the country freely print lies about the government proves that the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition does not control the media.

He said the Malaysian media, just as the media in other democracies, are free to choose whom they want to back, be it the government, the ruling party or the opposition.

While the pro-government media reported opposition activities and views, pro-opposition newspapers on the other hand had never been fair to the government and the ruling party, he said.

"I still hold to my speech delivered to the international conference on the role of the media in non-aligned countries on Sept 21 that governments which control the media are immoral governments," he said replying to Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail (Keadilan-Permatang Pauh) during question time.

Not only governments but also individuals, groups, organisations and news agencies themselves were deemed immoral when the media they controlled did not accord due treatment to others, he said.

"Even more immoral are those media dictated by certain quarters which hurl slander and carry lies and baseless reports," he said stressing that the Internet was being widely used by opposition for this purpose.

Dr Mahathir said incitements, lies and slander which the opposition posted on the Internet through their websites were rampant and articles from these sites were downloaded and disseminated extensively.

"Despite this, the government does not control the Internet. Likewise there is no control over books, CDs and tape recordings which contain slander, incitements and lies," he said.

Nonetheless, as it was duty-bound to ensure national peace and security, the government could not allow provocations to incite rioting and violence and to pit one community against another merely in the name of press freedom, he said.

The prime minister reminded those enjoying such freedom to show responsibility and abuse of the freedom would have to be curtailed before it brought catastrophic consequences to the nation.

Replying to Mohamed Sabu (PAS-Kuala Kedah), Dr Mahathir said the government did not own the mass media except for the Government Gazette.

He said that even in other countries like Britain and the United States the newspapers were openly pro-government.

"This is their choice and we can't stop them. You have Democrat and Republican newspapers in the US. In fact now they even have Republican judges and Democrat judges... a democrat judge sides with the Democrats, and Republican judges, they choose Bush," he said in jest to the laughter of the House.

He said that in Malaysia, newspapers like Harakah (PAS' official organ) and the Rocket (the DAP's mouthpiece) were blatantly breaking the rules by printing all sort of lies while the pro-government newspapers would try to give the correct picture.

Dr Mahathir reminded the local media to put national interest first, bearing in mind that if they were preoccupied with reporting racial riots all the time, no one would visit Malaysia.

He said the foreign media like CNN would continue showing footage of brief riots in Malaysia as if they dragged on round the clock because they have their own agenda to see Malaysia destabilised so that tourists and investors would shy away from the country.

"If you want to see how others look down upon us, watch CNN," the prime

minister added.
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