

04/03/2000

Ministry to scrutinise Astro programmes

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Information Ministry will scrutinise the contents of foreign programmes aired by Astro and take steps to curb them if they are found to influence local viewers with negative elements. Its Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said today it had received numerous complaints that the contents of some Astro programmes were contrary to local values.

"These complaints pointed out that some of the programmes have a bad influence on our society," he told a Press conference.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government would investigate allegations by several local community leaders, the literati and culturalists that foreign movies broadcast over Astro had an influence over Malaysian viewers.

There have also been reports quoting veteran actor and director Datuk Jins Shamsuddin as saying that such movies could influence the people's mindset and leave long-term negative effects on their thinking.

Joining the chorus was Federation of Peninsula Malay Students president Datuk Suhaimi Ibrahim who said all television stations must recognise their social obligation. He said they should not merely place importance on profits. He urged the Government to control the broadcasting of foreign movies over Astro.

Asked if there was no requirement for Astro to air a certain percentage of local programmes as imposed on television stations, Khalil said:

"Astro is a satellite station. As such we do not impose such rulings.

Now that there has been complaints, we will have to look into it."

On a different issue, Khalil said it was no concern of a group of American journalists who issued a protest on the Government's decision to allow the publication of Pas newsletter, Harakah, to twice a month.

"In the first place, it is a domestic issue which does not concern them.

Secondly, I do not think they understand that Harakah is not a daily newspaper but a political party bulletin instead," he said.

Khalil said Harakah was licensed by the Government as a newsletter only to be distributed among its party members.

"However, this has been flouted. Since it is a party newsletter, its contents should be confined to party issues and not on matters unrelated to Pas.

"Last year, it carried reports on matters which did not concern them and even spread lies like the issue of the purported poisoning of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"Since it has flouted the rules of its licensing, the Government has no choice but to act against it," Khalil said.

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