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`Get news on Muslim nations from source country'

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Islamic countries should get news on other Muslim nations from agencies in the source country, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

This was to address the bias against Muslims prevalent among Western media organisations, he said.

"We have lost confidence and belief in ourselves. Many local newspapers publish (foreign wire service reports). We get angry with CNN ... but we follow the reports by these international, very powerful news agencies," he said after opening the "International Seminar and Dialogue Session on Enhancing the Understanding of Islam for the Media" here.

The three-day event, held at the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM), is sponsored by Yayasan Al-Bukhary and Projek Lebuh raya Utara Selatan Berhad.

It is aimed at addressing the distorted image of Islam as presented by foreign and local media.

Participants include representatives of media organisations worldwide, such as from La Vie (Paris), The Australian, International Herald Tribune, Die Woche (Germany), Financial Times and Asiaweek.

Responding to a question from a Libyan journalist during the dialogue on how reporting on Islam could be improved, the Prime Minister urged Muslim countries to examine their own attitudes towards news.

He said it was important for Muslims to break the vicious cycle of depending too much on Western news agencies.

"We tend to follow Western wire services and think that is the truth ... we publish what comes from these wire services, thus giving the agencies more power to reach our citizens.

"I would like to appeal that we publish each other's news as they come directly from sources within the country."

Dr Mahathir urged that the International Muslim News Agency (IMNA) be revived and act as a primary source of foreign news for Muslim countries.

He said Muslim nations must give credence to the reporting which originated from these Islamic countries' media organisations.

"Over time, people will realise that the other news agencies have their own agenda," he added.

In his keynote address earlier, Dr Mahathir called on Western news agencies to correct their misperception on Islam, a religion which he said was the most misunderstood.

The Prime Minister said while terrorism by Muslims was invariably linked to Islam, terrorism by non-Muslims was not linked to their religious beliefs.

"All must admit that Muslims have not just been marginalised, but have also been oppressed."

However, with the world media hugely dominated by the West, Dr Mahathir said their views reflected "Western bias, Western policies".

"Quite often Western views are anti-Muslims. And the media willingly propagates this."

Dr Mahathir said the challenge facing the media was to realise that it had the influence to contribute towards the understanding of Islam by the rest of the world.

"Distort it and it will be distorted for the whole of this third millennium. Mould it into a thing of beauty and it will last forever."

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