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Mahathir-Eyewitnesses

GOVT PREPARED TO STUDY DRAFTING OF LAW TO PROTECT EYEWITNESSES, SAYS PM

SHAH ALAM, April 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the government is prepared to study the possibility of drafting a law for the protection of eyewitnesses to crimes.

"One of the things we should have is to protect (eye)witnesses from being threatened. I think (eye)witnesses can be protected which is something the government can consider," he told reporters after opening a conference of police commissioners, chief police officers, police commanders and police commandants here.

Dr Mahathir said that the problem of reluctance of eyewitnesses to crimes to come forward to assist in police investigations could be overcome if the police force were more multiracial.

He was elaborating on his speech which touched on cases where offenders were let off by the authorities due to lack of cooperation by eyewitnesses.

He expressed regret over the attitude of some members of the public who chose not to be involved in assisting the authorities in the investigations of criminal cases.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said that eyewitnesses could also be reluctant to divulge information to the authorities because they were under the impression that it was burdensome to do so as they need to respond to questions by the police.

"It is not because they are lacking in public spirit," he said.

In reply to a question on legal aspects, the prime minister said that the government was also prepared to study certain existing laws to make amendments including introducing provisions to make them more relevant and effective.

He said: "In some cases, there may be new legislation while in others, there may be amendments...I do not know".

They may include the Printing Presses and Publication Act, he said.

"The Printing Presses and Publication Act for instance may not be very effective...we'll find ways to restore its relevancy," he said.

Dr Mahathir said any possible changes to the Printing Presses and Publication Act would not point towards unlimited press freedom.

"We don't want to be like the press in other countries, the so-called liberal countries, who tell lies, fabricate stories, provoke people and don't give a fair picture," he said.

He said this group of press could do anything they like and not be punished.

In fact, he said some people had half-truths told as stories or made a story out of half-facts to make it interesting.

Dr Mahathir said he discovered that this kind of people did not care what would happen to other people arising from their fabricated pieces as long as their so-called news could be sold.

He said if such cases happened, then the international press could not claim to have any morality.

"For example, they may report that there is a lot of rioting in Malaysia when in fact, it is a very rare incident limited to one place only," he said.

He said the international press did not care about accuracy when reporting about Malaysia, hoping that this would affect the flow of investment coming into the country.

Dr Mahathir also said he gave an interview recently to the Asiaweek

magazine but what came out was not what he actually said.

He said, for instance, it was written that this country was in a state of tension whereas what he really told them in the interview was that he could go to the supermarket and drive on his own during the weekend as people came to greet him quite comfortably.

"What did they report? They reported that people were frightened to see the prime minister," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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