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`Newspapers not immune'

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RAWANG, Sun. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today said newspapers do not enjoy immunity from the Home Ministry.

Abdullah, who is the Home Minister, said they were constantly under the Ministry's scrutiny.

"If their contents warrant a warning, then we will serve them that warning," he said after competing in a charity golf tournament organised by Selangor Gerakan Youth at the Perangsang Golf Club in Templer Park near here.

Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai and other Gerakan leaders also competed.

Abdullah was asked whether the Ministry had taken any action against Chinese dailies for stirring racial issues.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in his winding-up speech at the 55th Umno general assembly yesterday, said Chinese dailies, especially Nanyang Siang Pau and sister paper China Press, had been very critical of the Government.

Dr Mahathir said the dailies started to fan racial sentiments after the Chinese rejection of the DAP in the 1999 general election.

Abdullah said Ministry officials normally monitored the policies and reports of news organisations, and these included vernacular newspapers.

He said newspapers which played up controversial or sensitive reports were normally summoned by the Ministry. "We will advise them to publish reports that are accurate and based on facts," Abdullah said.

He said this was to avoid situations where certain issues were blown out of proportion or exploited.

Abdullah said he had no knowledge whether the Ministry had acted against Nanyang Siang Pau or China Press over their controversial reports.

Nanyang Siang Pau and China Press have been in the limelight recently after the dailies were purchased by MCA's investment arm Huaren Holdings Sdn Bhd, sparking off protests within the party and the Chinese community.

The party, however, endorsed the deal today after 53.3 per cent of the 2,385 party delegates voted for the takeover at an extraordinary general meeting called to settle the dispute.