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PM on need for media to exercise restraint

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said the media should not sensationalise certain issues as it could fan public feeling.

He cited news coverage on the increase in the price of petrol and toll charges as an example.

Expressing disappointment, Dr Mahathir said in certain cases, although the guilt of those involved had yet to be ascertained, media reports had portrayed them as criminals.

"This is unfair to those involved as it causes them embarrassment," he said at a Press conference after chairing an Umno supreme council meeting at Menara Dato' Onn.

The police yesterday obtained a remand order against four people, including two former senior civil servants to facilitate investigations into the misappropriation of RM36.5 million from the fund for the hardcore poor.

Most dailies front-paged the story complete with pictures of the four.

Citing another example, Dr Mahathir, who is party president, said the media reported that Senators had requested for a three-fold increase in their allowances.

"What they are asking for is not an increase in their personal allowance but on funds to be spent for the people under their care."

Yesterday, it was reported that Senators have requested a three-fold increase in their allowances from RM100,000 to RM300,000 for their three-year term.

Dr Mahathir said he hoped the media would not sensationalise any issues but report accurately.

On the controversy surrounding the fund for the hardcore poor, the Prime Minister said the council discussed it but felt the media had not done justice to those involved.

He said the council held to the belief that one was innocent until proven guilty. "Therefore, if from the onset we have decided that someone is guilty, we may be victimising people."

On the RM7.3 billion economic stimulus package, Dr Mahathir said if the funds were not spent, the Government might take back the money.

"Usually, unused funds are forwarded for the following year but in this case, we want the money to be utilised."

On whether Government red tape had contributed to delay in utilising the funds, Dr Mahathir said this could not be denied.

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