

# PM: West curbing the press

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that absolute press freedom, which had become part of the democratic process, was no longer being championed by many developed nations after the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the United States.

The Prime Minister said that, in fact, there were authorities in developed nations that had directed the media not to publish reports on the al-Qaeda group.

"Most developed countries which had previously championed for absolute press freedom as part of the democratic process have acted against it.

"This was due to the (terrorist) attack on the World Trade Centre in New York on Sept 11, better known as the Sept 11 incident," he said in his speech at the 11th Malaysian Press Night organised by Malaysian Press Institute (MPI) at Putra World Trade Centre here last night.

Dr Mahathir said that institutes such as MPI played important roles in helping improve the nation's standard of journalism.

"Ethical journalism should be practised in the Malaysian media to ensure accurate dis-

semination of information to readers," he said.

He said the media was a powerful institution in society and media reports had negative or positive effects on the country.

"The media has often been said to be the fourth estate in society, which means it has a powerful influence on people's perceptions," he said.

He said that positive reporting helped the Government promote development, while negative reporting had the opposite effect.

MPI chairman Datuk Mazlan Nordin said a proposal to set up a national press council would be submitted for discussion to editors of all media organisations and the National Union of Journalists by the middle of this month.

He said that media experts and academicians from journalism faculties in local universities had prepared the proposal.

"A meeting of the relevant parties will be held after the submission to discuss the matter," he said.

The council was mooted about two years ago to function as a self-regulatory body to oversee media operations and ensure greater press freedom.