

29 MAY 2002

Mahathir-Media

DR MAHATHIR RAPS MEDIA FOR TREATING "CRIMINAL" AS HERO

KUALA LUMPUR, May 29 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today rapped the media for giving special treatment to a certain "criminal".

In a veiled reference to businessman Datuk Soh Chee Wen, he said that he could not understand why the media gave a hero's welcome to a "known criminal" who had returned home.

"Whereas we know that he is a criminal who absconded from Malaysia for several years and dared not return for fear of being arrested," he said.

Speaking to reporters after opening the FIABCI World Congress 2002 here, Dr Mahathir said that the person had now returned as a hero and the media fraternity was reporting what he wanted to do.

"I really don't understand why they are turning this kind of person into a hero," he said.

Asked whether he was referring to Soh who returned to face commercial crime charges after being on the run over three years, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know who I'm referring to. Your guess is as good as mine."

Dr Mahathir said that he noted that in most cases, the media has a role to play in highlighting issues.

Dr Mahathir said that it was also a fact that the issues brought up by the media sometimes made a person be seen as already guilty.

"And then, the issue is forgotten altogether even though that person is not guilty," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim has provided explanations over his criticisms of enforcement authorities.

The prime minister said that Rais had briefed him about it.

"Yes, he has something that has caused him to make the statements and we are looking at it," he said.

Rais was reported to have criticised enforcement authorities for not pursuing till the end criminal breach of trust (CBT) investigations involving certain individuals or organisations.

Asked whether Rais made the remarks based on fact, Dr Mahathir concurred.

He said that Rais had also informed him that he was not accusing anyone when he made the statement.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on Amnesty International's criticisms of Malaysia's human rights record in its latest report.

"That's them. In other places where people are oppressed, massacred even, they do not pay much attention...they focus on Malaysia," he said.

-- BERNAMA

MAD MFJ RM