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Press-Mechanisms

INSTALL MECHANISMS TO RESPOND TO BAD PRESS

KUALA LUMPUR, May 4 (Bernama) -- The Malaysian Government should establish mechanisms that can immediately respond to "bad reporting" by the foreign media, said a politician and former senator.

Institut Terjemahan Negara Berhad Chairman Datuk Abdul Aziz Rahman said that the country should have mechanisms that would act immediately and effectively in setting the facts and record straight on issues that were damaging to Malaysia's image.

Referring to recent reporting by the foreign media such as the Asian Wall Street Journal and The Economist on Malaysia and its leaders, he said quick responses to rebut allegations and to control the damage done by the foreign media were vital.

"Somebody must do something... and immediately respond to set the facts right," he said during a discussion in the "Point of View" programme aired over RTM's TV1 last night.

Chaired by the Malaysian National News Agency (BERNAMA) Executive Editor Azman Ujang, the talk show discussed a topic on "How Objective is the Foreign Media". New Straits Times Associate Editor Rehman Rashid was also in the panel.

The discussion was held in conjunction with the World Press Freedom Day 2003 commemorated here yesterday.

The Economist in its April 5 issue was said to have questioned the integrity of the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and levelled unfair criticism at his leadership.

Meanwhile, the Asian Wall Street Journal on April 21, carried an incorrect illustration of Dr Mahathir. Barely six months ago, the journal had used the Malaysian flag to accompany a story on Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

Abdul Aziz said that foreign media particularly the western media should be more objective in their reporting rather than being judgmental towards how a developing country like Malaysia should be run or managed.

He said Malaysian authorities should also put across their views strongly and set the facts out straight so that, foreign media knew what they had done was wrong.

Echoing the same sentiment, Rehman said that the answer to bad reporting was good reporting by giving and putting the records straight.

Opposing the idea of banning such foreign publications because of bad reporting, he said the action of banning would only indicate that they were right.

"The response to bad journalism or bad reporting is good journalism and good thinking. We should look at the arguments and respond to it."

Rehman said Malaysian authorities and leaders should emulate their Singapore counterparts for their quick responses and immediate action against issues which were considered damaging to their image.

He said Malaysians should immediately respond and correct such bad press.

Rehman, however, cautioned that Malaysians should not be dwelling too much on whether or not foreign media, particularly the western media recognised how they were running the country.

Saying that Malaysia had done well in managing the financial crises during the economic downturn in 1997 and 1998, he said it was more significant that other countries such as in Africa and Asia had recognised

it and wanted to learn from Malaysia.

Malaysia was showing an alternative way and it was more vital for the country to concentrate on efforts to ensure its survival and continued success, he said.

On the press freedom in Malaysia, Rehman said more freedom should be given to the media to be more professional in carrying its duties such as providing better access to information.

"Freedom is actually not a birth right but is more of a privilege... we must not think that freedom is something that cannot be taken away, we can lose it we don't cherish and respect it," he added.

On the other hand, Abdul Aziz said press freedom should come with responsibility, especially in a multiracial and multireligious country like Malaysia.

"To balance up the sensitivities of the various races, cultures and religions, we should treat press freedom carefully," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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