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Mahathir-Media

NEWS AGENCIES SHOULD FORM NETWORK AND TRUST EACH OTHER - DR M

KUALA LUMPUR, June 8 (Bernama) -- National news agencies should form a network linkage to channel news and information among them and trust each other to provide accurate information about the goings-on in developing countries, former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

By doing so, they need not rely on international wire agencies which he said were biased in their reports about developing nations.

He said it was time national news agencies get closer to each other towards furthering the causes of the South.

"Foreign wire agencies are always biased in their reports about developing countries. So, if we don't report things by ourselves...if we don't trust ourselves, then of course we are not going to get nearer each other," he said when delivering a talk entitled "The Role of Media in Furthering South-South Cooperation" at a leading hotel, here.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a dinner hosted by the Malaysian media in conjunction with the 12th General Assembly of the Organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agencies (Oana).

Present were Information Minister Datuk Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir and his deputy Datuk Zainuddin Maidin.

Dr Mahathir said he hoped the news agencies of South-South countries would try to break the impasse of depending on foreign wire agencies for information on developing countries.

"You learn to trust each other and contribute towards furthering the cause of the South," he said.

Dr Mahathir said currently national news agencies tend to rely on international news agencies for news and information about developing nations.

"But their (international news agencies) reports are inaccurate...tend to cause damage to developing countries, resulting in people not wanting to

visit or invest in the countries.

"As such, this makes the role of national news agencies more important," he said.

Dr Mahathir said news agencies could use the Internet linkage to distribute news and pictures speedily to help enhance cooperation among South countries.

"Unfortunately, this has not become very popular," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said many predictions by international magazines had been inaccurate and proven to be wrong.

"When containers are used to ship goods about 35 years ago... there were reports that this is not going to be the future, that containers will never be popular for transporting goods. But (today) most of the things are shipped by containers," he said.

Dr Mahathir cited several examples in Malaysia, including the race relations, to point out the biased reporting by the international press about this country.

"...that underneath there is tremendous tension. Going to fight each other. Won't be very stable. And they will continue to say this everytime they mention about Malaysia," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said international news agencies and the press always questioned the press freedom in Malaysia.

"The fact that their own newspapers are printed and distributed in Malaysia and Southeast Asia is not evident enough for Malaysia that the press is free. We have never restricted or never try to censor them," he said.

He said in Malaysia there were newspapers which supported and criticised the government.

"Why it is wrong to support the government. In England, there are papers supporting the Labour, Conservative and also the Liberal (parties). (But) this country (Malaysia) has been labelled as a country with no free press.

"They come here, only spend five minutes, and they will be instant experts (about Malaysia). They must be endowed with some mystique powers," he said.

Later at a question-and-answer session with delegates, Dr Mahathir said fighting terrorism was not like fighting a conventional war where the enemy was known.

As such, terrorism must not be tackled through the use of force (security means) but by finding out the root causes.

"Because we don't know who they are. They may be sitting next to you," he said.

He also said to attain developed country status by 2020 did not necessarily mean to be an industrialised nation.

"We can be a developed country, not necessarily industrialised, but we must have the capacity to certain industries, if not for all," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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