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`News agencies should forge ties'

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The national news agencies in different countries should foster better links among themselves and learn to trust one another, former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

Dr Mahathir said such co-operation was necessary as the national news agencies could not rely on foreign news agencies which tended to distort facts.

"The national news agencies should be united and establish close working relationships.

"The foreign news agencies often distort facts to paint a bad picture about the country that they are reporting on.

"Such examples can be seen in their reporting on Malaysia where they paint negative pictures about the racial unity in our country and that we are about to implode.

"This kind of reporting does a lot of damage to the developing countries," said Dr Mahathir in his speech at a dinner held in conjunction with the 12th Organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agencies (Oana) general assembly.

The dinner was jointly hosted by the New Straits Times, The Star and the Utusan group. The two-day assembly which started yesterday was attended by about 100 delegates from 27 news agencies of 24 countries.

Also present were Bernama chairman Datuk Mohd Anuar Zaini, its general manager Datuk Syed Jamil Jaafar and New Straits Times Press chief executive officer Syed Faisal Albar.

Dr Mahathir said there were perceptions among the foreign news agencies that the local media were controlled by the Government and there was no Press freedom in the country.

"What is wrong in being supportive of the Government if they do something good? It is the right of the papers. But even here, there are some media which are not supportive of the Government."

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