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Dr M: I'm not bothered... (HL)

Ramlan Said

BINTULU, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today it is not worthwhile arguing with Western-based publications like The Economist as they had developed a biased view of Malaysia.

Appearing not in the least bothered by criticisms bent on running him down, the Prime Minister said such magazines, and the people behind them, held the belief that people in the West were always smarter and better than people in the East or developing countries.

"If we show them a piece of white paper, they will say it is black. When we ask why it is black, they will say 'I don't know but I see it is black,'" he added.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on The Economist, which recently published reports belittling the Malaysian Government and its leadership.

He was speaking at a Press conference after opening the Petronas Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) Complex near here, his first official public function since returning to work on Monday after a two-month leave.

Dr Mahathir said the London-based magazine had no credibility as attested by the many wrong predictions it had made in the past against Malaysia and many other countries, including Britain.

"This is because they are not reporting. What they are interested in is to run down people, be critical and that way they can sell their stupid magazine."

Dr Mahathir also said: "When Malaysia has done far better than practically all the other countries that achieved independence at the same time with us, they are not happy.

"They would like to see us fighting each other, like in Africa, unable to manage our own country.

"It is not worthwhile trying to convince them because they can never be convinced. Why? Because of this white men's attitude - that white men are cleverer than sawo matang (coloured) people like us."

Dr Mahathir said if The Economist was looking ways to pit one person against another, "let them do that, I am not going to respond to such stupidity".

On whether the Government had any plans to ban magazines like The Economist, he said there were none.

"I think Malaysians are very intelligent. They know when they see dirt. I think they can distinguish dirt... this is pure dirt."

Earlier, Dr Mahathir congratulated the management and staff of Petronas for their quick acquisition of knowledge and skills which had made the company an international player.

Recalling the decision to establish the company, he said it was done with trepidation, adding that the Government never really expected much from it.

"Certainly, we never imagined that Petronas would be operating in many foreign countries, prospecting for oil and gas, producing, refining, laying pipes, transporting and trading in oil.

"But today, Petronas is known throughout the world. I think we have made some progress in this industry," he said.

Also present at the opening of the Petronas LNG Complex were Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, Petronas chairman Tan Sri Azizan Zainul Abidin, and Petronas president and chief executive officer Tan Sri Hassan Marican.

At the Press conference, asked by this reporter on Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's performance in running the country during his two-month leave, he said his deputy had done well as acting Prime Minister.

"I think he has come through with flying colours," he said. "One thing I can assure you is that while I was on holiday, Abdullah did not ring me up to find out what he should do."

Dr Mahathir, who was in a jovial mood, added: "He was able to carry on on his own. Although he did report some of the things, all decisions were his. So, I think he has done well in the last two months... I wish my holiday was longer."