

Mahathir pot shots bombard detractors
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Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad killed three birds with one stone when he delivered the keynote address at the Asian Bloggers and Social Media Conference this morning.

True to character, Mahathir who is a regular blogger, managed to hit out at several of his detractors albeit without mentioning names.

NONE On the receiving end was "a Malaysian politician" - evidently Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim (right) - who was mocked in an example of how blogs surpass global boundaries.

Mahathir said that, with the advent of blogs, the foreign media appear to be having second thoughts about this individual.

"There is a Malaysian politician who is praised by the foreign press most of the time because (they) want to see a regime change in Malaysia," he told an audience of about 200.

"Now they seem to be changing their minds (through) their writing in blogs about this person."

Thanks to blogs, he said, it is now known that "so-and-so has been involved in activities detrimental to the nation".

NONE Mahathir, who was escorted into the hall by Berjaya CEO Vincent Tan, again expertly dragged Anwar into the fray when commenting on the importance of telling the truth when blogging.

He illustrated his point by explaining why he has not taken legal action against author Barry Wain, who had claimed that Mahathir 'squandered' RM100 billion during his 22-year tenure as prime minister.

"People ask me if I want to sue. The process of law is long and can go on for years. For example, (in) one case in Malaysia, a trial (is being) held up due to delaying tactics by a person concerned," he said.

Ttony blair his is a likely reference to Anwar's ongoing sodomy trial which has been stretched out due to several applications by the defence.

The only person with the 'privilege' of being named outright was former British prime minister Tony Blair (right), who was branded a "liar" for declaring war against Iraq.

"This liar was invited to speak on how to achieve things. He was paid RM1 million to tell (a group of 'Malaysian achievers' and) teach them how to lie," he said of a pet subject.

Taste of his own medicine

The media was not left unscathed as Mahathir, often criticised for imposing media blackouts while in office, complained about "getting a taste of my own medicine".

NONE However, he claimed that gag orders in his time had been issued with "good intentions", unlike those imposed by "others who have bad intentions towards (me)".

Mahathir said he started blogging when he fell out of favour with "some editors" and that he is now "shocked" to know that even Israelis are reading his blog.

"I get some Zionists getting angry with me over what I say but they have a right to be angry, just as I have a right to be angry with them," he said.

In supporting freedom of speech, Mahathir said the only thing that should be censored on the Internet is pornography.

This is because easy access to pornography has led to a rise in sex crimes in Malaysia, particularly among "young and excitable people".

"Imagine a teenager seeing all this filthy pornography and he gets worked up, and the next thing he sees is an old lady or a baby and he needs to get rid of his tension.

"I went (in) to see (if the material is easily accessible) for my education. You put 'sex' in Yahoo and all types of filth came through," he said, to much amusement.

More than 400 participants are expected over the two-day conference in Kuala Lumpur. It features discussions on freedom of speech and the legal ramifications of blogging.

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