

Give more space for voices of moderation, media told

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KUALA LUMPUR: The media should give more space to the “voices of moderation and diplomacy” and not those that incite war and hatred, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

This is because the majority of people want peace and stability in the world, and not chaos, he said.

“It appears that if you say something tough or extreme, you get media coverage. In a way, this is wrong and unfair.

“Most people believe in moderation and peace, so we must hear more voices of reason and diplomacy, not war,” he said.

“If I had a wish, it would be for the voices of moderation to be given more prominent coverage.

“Too often, the headlines are hogged by the language of hatred and aggression — the language of threat and confrontation.”

Speaking at the Asia Media Summit yesterday, Abdullah reminded media professionals to be aware of the effects of their actions.

“One simple report, photograph or cartoon can turn a peaceful society into a violent one. What goes out of a printing press or is beamed out from a broadcasting station cannot be taken back.

“Regrets or corrections can never entirely undo the harm that is done,” said Abdullah.

He took several questions from the floor and earned robust applause for the clarity of his succinct answers.

Below are excerpts of his replies to several questions:

• *What can Asean do to address unrest in parts of Southeast Asia through the media?*

“We know there are problems in Thailand, south Philippines and



Abdullah having a hearty laugh at comments from delegates during the summit. — NST picture by Tun Izhaz Tun Ishak

Indonesia and we are very concerned. What we want most is peace, stability and prosperity. Any tendency to aggravate the situation will not be welcome. We want the media to play a positive role, to be careful of what they report... We must know the problem carefully before we write articles and make allegations.”

• *How can dialogue be strengthened?*

“We have to be patient, to be ready to listen and not shout down the other side, that’s very important. To go into a discussion with fixed minds, to make assumptions and accusations, will create more

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problems and won’t help in the discussion.

“On the issue of the caricatures of Prophet Muhammad, the Western media did not anticipate such outrage from the Muslim world. The West did not understand. You may not have the same beliefs, but you should understand the other side.”

Organised by the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development, the two-day summit was attended by about 350 delegates from 40 countries.

The event’s principal sponsor was the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.