

Western media 'no better than us', says Dr M
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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 2 — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad took a swipe at the Western media today, pointing out that “they are really no better than us,” in a stinging rebuke following the phone-hacking scandal surrounding Rupert Murdoch’s *News of The World* tabloid.

In a posting on his popular blog, the former prime minister, who has been heavily criticised by the international media for his authoritarianism and graft scandals in his administration, pointed out that “given half a chance they (Western media) would cheat and abuse their positions.”



Dr Mahathir has had testy ties with the foreign media. — File pic

Allegations of hacking at News Corp’s British newspapers, in particular reports that journalists accessed the voicemails of murder victims, have triggered a judicial inquiry and calls by some British politicians to cap News Corp’s media ownership.

London police reopened their investigation into phone hacking in January, shortly after the British prime minister’s communications chief Andy Coulson resigned because of allegations of phone hacking at the *News of the World* while he was the paper’s editor.

The paper’s royal reporter Clive Goodman and private detective Glenn Mulcaire were jailed in 2007 for intercepting the voicemail messages of royal aides.

Dr Mahathir, as well as successive Barisan Nasional (BN) administrations, has had testy ties with the foreign media which have been critical about Malaysia’s human rights record, as well as a lack of press freedom and also the government’s response to dissent.

Recently, the Najib administration also hit out at the foreign media for what it termed as sensational coverage of the Bersih rally. Newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *The Economist* have hit out at the government for its crackdown on activists.

“We are used to the high moral ground taken by the Western press. We almost cringe mentally when they criticise us for our poor record on human rights, our alleged failure

to respect the rule of law, our corruption and the injustices that we perpetrate against others, etc, etc," Dr Mahathir wrote today.

"Now we are witnessing their most powerful media mogul admitting that the paper he owns, *News of the World*, has been hacking telephones to listen in on private conversations and to use what they hear when reporting in their paper. Now we hear of bribes given to soften reports by journalists about all kinds of shenanigans by powerful people. And their politicians are just as afraid of the press as we are."

Dr Mahathir said that while he agreed that media played a role as a watchdog overseeing the impropriety of government practices and policies, many foreign media reports in Malaysia were far from the truth.

"But once one of them says something bad about this country and its government (and other countries too) others will repeat it without any attempt to verify the truth of the reports.

"I was reported to have practised cronyism; that I manipulated the judiciary, that I threw into jail my deputy by Western journalists who for one reason or another had taken a dislike for me. After that every journalist when reporting about Malaysia must mention that I had practised cronyism, manipulated the judiciary and threw my deputy into jail. For that matter every book written about Malaysia must include these items. The words of the first journalist who reported this must be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. No amount of refuting the allegations by anyone would be accepted," he said.

He said it had long been suspected that Western journalists accepted bribes, "but the reporting on the hacking by the News of the World has confirmed that Western journalists are not the purveyors of truth that they are supposed to be."

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