

PM challenges media to set better standards

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PUTRAJAYA: Be socially responsible or carry gossip that could create racial and religious tension among Malaysians.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday gave this choice to mainstream Malaysian media in the face of blogs that tended to sensationalise issues.

"There's no need to compete. No need to be carried away by the sensationalism of such websites. You must understand your role as the mainstream media," the Prime Minister told a Press conference after launching the Internal Security Ministry's Mass Media Conference 2006.

The conference was attended by academicians, ministry staff and members of the media.

Abdullah said the mainstream media should not emulate blogs, especially those on politics, which may be more interesting.

There was nothing to be gained by trying to be as popular as blogs and other Internet political forums.

"You have a social responsibility to fulfil by avoiding news or gossip that could create tension," said the Prime Minister, who is also Internal Security Minister.

He said the Malaysian media had the freedom to write but had to respect its limits.

"Don't sensationalise news that can heighten racial or religious tensions," he said to a question about the credibility of the mainstream media which often stayed away from issues covered by Internet sites.

Abdullah said even poison-pen letters had become a source of news.

"You should not choose to be popular for the wrong reasons. You should not be competing with

someone you know is doing something wrong. On these sites, people make statements that can stir ill feelings.

"Do you need to make news out of such views? Even though what was said might be correct? Do you need to report it?" Abdullah asked.

The Prime Minister called on mainstream media journalists to understand their role, the laws that governed Press freedom and their responsibility to society.

He said even though Malaysia was more developed today, Malaysians were still sensitive about many things, especially issues that touched on race and religion.

"The media's responsibility is to decide whether to publish or not, whether something is appropriate (for public consumption). If it will cause bad reactions, then there is

no need to air those views."

Abdullah said the media should help the public understand that achieving Vision 2020 — what he termed the "national mission" — was a task for all Malaysians.

To a question, he said he was generally satisfied with the media's reporting of sensitive issues such as the Article 11 Forum and other issues involving religion.

The conference, which ends today, will address topics such as media law and control, local media and the challenges of globalisation, and the competition between print and the web media.

At the session on media law and control, the panelists debated whether current laws were outdated because of new media technology, and whether laws were applied fairly to all media, as print and electronic media were regulated by different ministries.