

Govt respects press freedom

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... BUT USE IT RESPONSIBLY, SAYS ABDULLAH

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PUTRAJAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday assured the media that the government will not rush to take action against them every time there was a complaint as it is aware that journalists have a difficult responsibility to carry out.

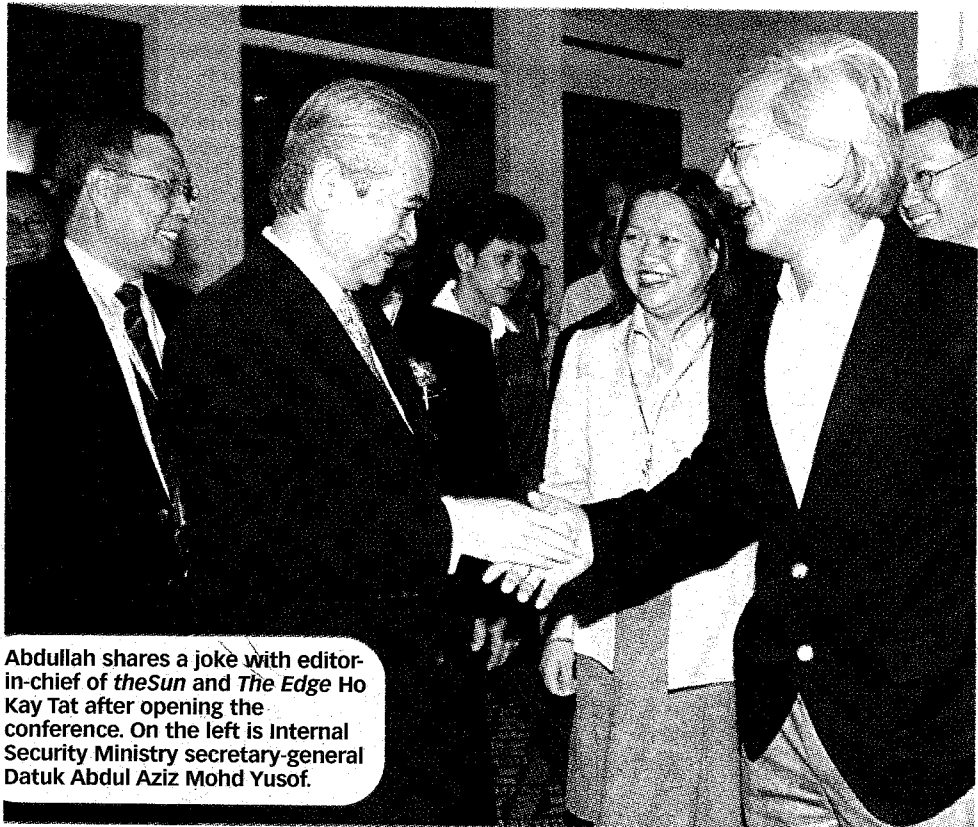
Opening a two-day mass media conference themed "Mass Media and Globalisation Challenges" organised by the Internal Security Ministry, Abdullah said: "The media have a very important role that the people depend on, and there is press freedom, and it is the ministry's responsibility to understand this and to think wisely before acting (against any media)."

He added: "This responsibility is difficult and the freedom with this responsibility can be easily abused if we are not careful but I hope the media and the ministry will cooperate with sincerity."

He urged journalists and media organisations to be sensitive to the multi-racial and multi-religious make-up of the country and to exercise control and responsibility when reporting on issues that involved race and religion.

In spite of the rise in literacy rate and progress in the country, Malaysians are still very sensitive to these issues, so the media has to be careful with such news.

To illustrate a point, he said: "Yes, an individual might have made some comments but does it need to be made news? Such issues might bring chaos to



Abdullah shares a joke with editor-in-chief of *theSun* and *The Edge* Ho Kay Tat after opening the conference. On the left is Internal Security Ministry secretary-general Datuk Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof.

the country?"

The prime minister also said newspapers remain the main source of information for the people despite the electronic age of the internet with its websites, blogs and even short message service (SMS).

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should not try to emulate and compete with what goes on over the internet where all sorts of stories, many of them not true, are available.

Speaking to reporters later, Abdullah, who is also internal security minister, said the ministry is aware of the importance of press freedom.

He said: "The ministry

has been very careful (in dealing with the media). Some people say it is too slow and some people say it is too fast. Sometimes we have to be fast, sometimes we have to be slow and sometimes we have to take a step backward (and not act hastily)."

However, Abdullah said, in carrying out their role, the media should not misuse their freedom.

The prime minister also urged the media to help shape the thinking of the people, especially in relation to the country's development.

"It is important for people to realise that Vision 2020 is

a national vision for all Malaysians - the government, private sector, schools, non-governmental organisation and housewives even."

On globalisation, he said Malaysia cannot build walls around itself to keep it out and called on the media to help educate the people about the phenomenon so they can deal with it.

"Give them the right information and don't feed them lies as that is wrong," he said. "Invite the people to reflect on what is going on but don't deliberately sensationalise things."

Abdullah also quipped about the obsession of the media with the marriage of singer Siti Nurhaliza and the lives of other celebrities. He urged the media to be sensitive and not do anything to create problems for these people.