

MAJLIS JAMUAN MAKAN MALAM ANJURAN KELAB KEBANGSAAN WARTAWAN
MALAYSIA
KELAB SELANGOR, KUALA LUMPUR,

12 OKTOBER 1981

Yang Di Pertua
Kelab Kebangsaan Wartawan-wartawan Malaysia,
Encik Mazlan Nordin
Ahli-ahli Jawatankuasa,
Dif-dif Kehormat,

Tuan-tuan dan puan-puan sekalian.

Saya mengucapkan terima kasih kepada Kelab Kebangsaan Wartawan-wartawan Malaysia kerana menjemput saya ke Majlis pada malam ini untuk meraikan saya. Saya merasa sungguh bahawa kadangkala wartawan-wartawan adalah lebih berpengaruh daripada ahli-ahli politik.

2. Saya telah diberitahu bahawa Kelab Kebangsaan Wartawan-wartawan Malaysia ini selain daripada mengadakan jamuan-jamuan makan, dan ini tidaklah salah, juga akan menambahkan lagi aktiviti-aktiviti yang berkaitan dengan bidang kewartawanan. Ini memanglah baik dan saya harap usaha-usaha seumpama ini dapat ditingkatkan dari masa ke semasa.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. It is indeed a pleasure for me to be with you, distinguished members of the press. In extending to me the invitation for the function tonight, which I am told is in dinner I do not have much choice but to excede to the request.

4. Now may I take this opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts on the subject of the role and responsibilities of the Press in Malaysia. Perhaps I should say, let me reiterate some of my already known views about the press in Malaysia and everywhere else. We in Malaysia are committed to a democratic form of government. This is embodied in our Constitution, in the Rukunegara and in the manifestos of the various political parties. For democracy to function effectively and thrive we need an informed public. In a democracy, it is the people who in the final analysis decide the policy and the direction of the Government. And kthe party elected by them to form the Government is the one which they consider is capable of

implementing and pursuing policies which they generally approve. The better informed the public is on all issues the better are they able to make the right decisions as to which party should form the government. Therefore an important function of the Press in a democratic society is to educate and inform the public on issues so as to enable them to make their choice.

5. I am happy to see that the Press in this country has discharged this important function admirably. Of late the Press have been even more active in this area. New techniques and approaches are being used in order to elucidate public concerns, behaviour and reactions. This is a healthy trend. However, I noticed, that in some cases a few of our reporters in their enthusiasm and zeal were somewhat carried away with the result that the reporting tends to be rather non-factual and verging on sensationalism. There have also been cases where the reporting has been anything but objective. While the Press reporting is balanced you will be failing in your important function of keeping the public informed. As much as you have a right to expose any shortcomings you also have an equal responsibility to ensure accuracy in your reporting. Failure to maintain balanced reporting will result in the creation of an image of a country. That doesn't seem to be able to do anything right. You know very well that we do a lot of right things in this country. How else can you explain the prosperity and the good life. Even the poor in this country are better off than the poor elsewhere. As to the objects of your investigative reporting, it is important to remember that they are largely human. Their ability to defend themselves is very limited. Inaccurate and possibly slanderous reporting will create despondency and will not help achieve the good results that we are all after. This is particularly so of Government officers, who by and large are able and hard-working.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

6. In our multi-racial society the responsibility of the Press goes beyond just accurate reporting. The sensitivities of the various races have to be considered. Political stability and the peaceful co-existence among the races are two important conditions which the Government strives to promote and preserve. In all our actions and policies the Government takes special care that these two factors are always taken into consideration. It would be inimical to the efforts of the Government if the Press in their overzealousness were to report events without giving due consideration to the sensitivities of the various races.

7. Some of you regard the need to exercise certain restraint in order not to ruffle these sensitivities as a limitation to the proper and effective working of the media. I believe, however, that these constraints should be regarded as a challenge to the skill and maturity of our journalists, broadcasters and others in the media and also as a test of their sense of responsibility.

8. As members of the Press you are, no doubt, concerned with the Freedom of the Press. You know my views on the freedom of the press. I don't believe that absolute freedom of the press exists anywhere, even in the liberal western countries. There is always some restraints exercised if not by the Government at least by the owners, advertisers, the freedom he wants in a socialist paper and vice-versa. And of course a socialist reader will not get the freedom of the press in a conservative paper. Even if the people who disagree with the slant of a particular paper are given space, their views are immediately smothered by the editors reply or comments which are published immediately. Thus the freedom of the press are for those who agree and even these few are not too free. The media exercises its own censorship, not in accordance with national needs but according to the narrow views of the people who control the paper.

9. These are facts which I state. Even now as the Prime Minister I do not get the freedom of the press. Within the country and more so outside, my words are often twisted in order to suit the purpose of the particular journal, which frequently is nothing more than the desire to popularise and increase the circulation of the paper. Recently I received a call from BBC London who asked for my comments on the Government's policy well regards to British suppliers. I refused this telephone interview because I know everything I said would be used against me and against Malaysia. For me the BBC is not a part of the free press system.

10. What I say is impleasant. But if you examine yourself you will admit that frequently reporting by the press has done a lot of harm particularly sensationalist reporting. The exposures of private views have rendered diplomacy not only difficult but less effective. If everone of us knows of the private thought that we entertain of each other, we will not be on talking terms. Apply this to nations and the result will be strained relations if not war. A case in point is the statement attributed to Mrs. Ghandi recently. The Thai response was completely predictable and justified. However, I cannot imagine a head of Government of Mrs. Ghandi's stature being so undiplomatic. Now of course it has been denied that she made

those remarks on Thailand. But the "fat's already in the fire". Relations will never be quite the same again.

11. Freedom of the Press should be exercised with restraint and responsibility. But quite a few of those in the profession feel that restraint and responsibility means a limitation on the freedom of the press. If total licence is considered as freedom of the press, than freedom of the press does not exist anywhere in the world. And in the view of the people outside the select group who control the press in one way or another, freedom of the press also does not exist. Freedom of the Press is a myth, a myth invented by the so-called liberal west to serve their own purpose--since they, through their world-wide control of the media, stand to benefit most. Our press should not subscribe to that kind of freedom, much less be a part of their indirect intellectual hegemony. We should think of what is good for our country and our people as a whole.

12. If we think of our country and our people then the narrow interests of the press as an institution fades into insignificance. The needs of the nation and the people are infinitely greater. And towards these greater needs the press is in a most eminent position to contribute. Just as you can agitate the people, you can also calm them and help them develop those values that can contribute most towards their well-being. Malaysia needs a period of stability during which to consolidate its gains and to build up the work ethics and values that will make it strong and viable. The Government will do its best. But the Government needs the cooperation of everyone, including of course the press. You have done well so far, but there is much more to be done before all the peoples of Malaysia are united with one single objective, to build a greater Malaysia, where peace and prosperity and the freedom of the responsible are assured.

Tuan-tuan dan Puan-puan.

13. Bagi mengakhiri ucapan saya, saya sekali lagi mengucapkan terima kasih kepada The National Press Club yang telah sudi menjemput saya dan memberi peluang saya berucap. Saya berharap saya tidak dianggap terlalu dogmatic. Sebagai seorang yang biasa di banned dari mengedar pendapatnya melalui tulisannya saya faham betapa tinggi nilainya peranan media. Di samping itu saya juga percaya bahawa "the loss of a minor freedom for an individual is of little consequence as compared to the well-being of a nation". Saya berharap pendapat saya ini ditimbang oleh tuan-tuan dan puan-puan. Sungguhpun apa yang saya perkatakan ini tidak menyenangkan, tetapi saya percaya jika tuan-tuan dan puan-puan membuat bandingan antara sekarang dan dahulu, antara Malaysia dan beberapa negara lain, tuan-tuan dan puan-puan akan dapati bahawa "the bark is worse than the bite".

Sekian, terima kasih.