

# Of rumours and the PM's health

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THE Prime Minister's health has been the subject of some intense rumour-mongering. Ever since he underwent a bypass operation in early 1989, such gossips have been making the rounds from time to time.

This is an occupational hazard for every political leader, particularly for one who has had major surgery. But what is puzzling to the authorities is that most of these malicious loose talk seem to have originated from south of the border. The latest to occur was on Thursday when Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was supposed to have suffered a heart attack, stroke or whatever and admitted to the hospital.

Such rumours are usually spread with calls from some businessmen in the republic, quite often from the financial sector, that the PM was seriously ill or hospitalised.

This would be sufficient to cause a panic on this side and the telephones would be working overtime as everyone tried to find out more. The calm



would be restored only if the PM should appear on television showing him attending a function.

So far, the normal explanation was that some stock market dabblers were just trying to make a fast buck. In short, the *shorties* were at work once again. If this was a daft thing to do, Malaysia would appear to have bigger dafters to work themselves into a frenzy over such rumours.

The Singapore Broadcasting Corporation was able to clear the air over the latest incident by carrying a denial in its news bulletins.

The worrying thing is that the explanation that such rumour-mongering is merely a ploy to manipulate the stock market may be just an excuse. The short-term effect

may be to make money but there is some concern here that things may not be as harmless as they appear on the surface.

Such rumours are too regular for comfort. The nagging doubt is that other elements may be at work aimed at undermining the political and economic stability of Malaysia.

It is no secret that many countries, particularly the Western powers, are envious of Malaysia's achievements and stability. Such rumours could be one way of weakening this progress.

So the rumours may not be as innocent or as simple as just some people wishing to play the market. The government cannot be blamed for reading more into this unhealthy development.

In the long-term, and if these activities should be allowed to continue, they could very well erode Malaysia's political and economic stability and might eventually affect bilateral relations.

The rumours are calculated to do the maximum damage as this would be the only way to create confusion for whatever motives. This has given rise to the assumption that there may be a sinister group at work which is out to subvert the country.

By timing their activities at chosen intervals, they could give the impression that Malaysia is unstable and this may influence the decision of foreign investors that this is not the place to start their projects.

This view cannot be discounted since Malaysia is doing well economically with growth well above the other developing nations. It is also possible that Malaysia's high profile in regional and international affairs had made some governments jealous of its success as well.