

14/05/1997

Dr M: The Press is free to speculate on my leave

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Press is free to speculate over his decision to go on long leave beginning May 19.

Responding to a question from a foreign journalist at a Press conference today after witnessing the underwriting agreement between Bakun Hydro-Electric Corporation Bhd and a consortium of underwriters at the Putra World Trade Centre, Dr Mahathir said: "I think the Press is very free to speculate."

The Prime Minister was asked to confirm on three speculations which arose following his decision to take a long vacation.

The speculations were:

* that he wanted to "test" his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, whom he has appointed as acting Prime Minister;

* that he was apparently ill; and

* that he was actually not taking any leave at all since he would be doing some work like promoting the Multimedia Super Corridor and making official visits to several countries.

When it was pointed out that the speculations were not the work of the media but the public who wanted to know what was happening, Dr Mahathir said:

"They will speculate through the Press anyway. You can tell them to assume either one of the three speculations."

(END)