

18 JUL 1998

Mahathir-Johan

NO CLAMPDOWN ON LOCAL MEDIA, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

BANGI, July 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today denied foreign media reports of clampdown on the local media following the resignation of Utusan Melayu Group editor-in-chief Datuk Johan Jaaffar.

"That's the kind of thing they will say. But what they say doesn't matter to us. What we say matters," he told reporters after opening "Sri Utusan", the new ultra-modern printing complex of Utusan Melayu (Malaysia) Berhad here.

However, Dr Mahathir said the government now finds that when it asked for cooperation from the local media, some would immediately tell the foreign media that the government has instructed them, implying that the government controls the media.

"Yet, the local media hit back at the government much more often from the foreign media sometimes," he said.

He refuted allegation that the resignation of Johan was due to political pressure.

"When he came, there were talks of political pressure...now he leaves. They all come and go sometimes," he said.

Later, when met by reporters, Utusan Group executive chairman Tan Sri Kamarul Ariffin said that the issue of political pressure did not arise.

"All this did not arise. It is all speculation by outsiders especially the media and possibly instigated by the locals, but actually there is none. He wanted to step down, that is all," he said.

Kamarul Ariffin said that he received Johan's resignation letter last Tuesday but had not made a decision.

He said that the company's board of directors would meet on Tuesday to discuss the resignation and would possibly name his successor.

-- BERNAMA

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