

28/01/2000

I am well, says PM (HL)

Saiful Azhar Abdullah in London

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here early yesterday after visiting Argentina and the Caribbean and immediately dismissed rumours that he was ill.

"I am well and have never been ill at all," Dr Mahathir told Malaysian journalists at Hyde Park Gate apartment where he is staying during his five-day visit here.

Well aware of rumours in Malaysia that he had fallen off a horse while vacationing in Argentina, Dr Mahathir said these were lies spread by people with "evil motives" to sabotage and make the country suffer economically.

The rumours were aimed at depressing the stock market and frightening investors.

According to Dr Mahathir, the truth was that it was a member of his entourage, someone who had not ridden before, who fell from his horse but was not injured.

When asked why the rumour-mongers persisted with their activities, he said: "To prove that the economic recovery is not real so that people will not have faith in Malaysia. That would not be good for their politics."

Dr Mahathir said that he had been on a very enjoyable stay in Argentina where he rode for up to 30km a day and even crossed a river on horseback, "something not many people had done."

"I have been well and have never been ill at all ... although the usual liars would say that although he says he is well, actually he is not well. That although he looks healthy, actually he is not healthy and although he is alive, he is actually dead."

Dr Mahathir said the economy has been doing very well. "Much more than I expected. Originally I predicted the (KLSE Composite Index) to reach 900 by the end of this year or early next year but we reached that a long time ago.

"I am sure this is very disappointing for the Opposition."

Dr Mahathir said no single person was behind this rumour-mongering, but the Opposition had a special department to tell lies on the Internet.

He said it had been proven time and again that rumours posted on the Internet were lies. But he reiterated that the Government would not interfere with the Internet.

"We have accepted that the Internet should be free and we are not going to interfere."

On whether investors in the stock market would believe such rumours, the Prime Minister said it was up to them to decide.

"A stock market is a stock market. If they want to believe in rumours, then (so be it)."

Rumours about Dr Mahathir's health spread across the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange on Wednesday, causing some share prices to fall.

In Kuala Lumpur, Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin was also asked to comment on rumours of Dr Mahathir's ill-health.

Daim said they were created by people out to undermine the economy.

"These people created the rumours because they don't like our economic growth and our market is doing well now," he said.

Dr Mahathir and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali arrived at the Luton airport about 6.30am from Grenada.

They were welcomed by Malaysia's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom

Datuk Mohd Amir Jaafar.

Besides meeting the new president of Argentina, Fernando De la Rúa, Dr Mahathir also met the prime ministers of St Lucia, St Vincent, Antigua and Grenada, all island States in the Caribbean.

He said President De la Rúa was keen to visit Malaysia and he was happy to note that Malaysia Airlines flights to Argentina had been constantly full.

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