

Report on 'assassination plot'

PM: IT'S NOT RIGHT

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PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, saddened by a local newspaper report about a plot to assassinate him and his deputy, said such sensationalised reporting could affect the country's economy.

"I have no information about it. I am sad that there are people sensationalising news that can have repercussions on the economy," he told reporters when approached after taping his New Year message at the Prime Minister's Office here yesterday.

The Sun newspaper carried a front-page story on Tuesday of a plot to assassinate the prime minister and Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in a month or two, claiming that a hit man had been hired.

Dr Mahathir said the report, which was picked up and circulated worldwide by news agencies, had given foreigners the impression that Malaysia was infested with terrorists who could make anyone their target.

"This is not the situation in Malaysia," the Prime Minister said, emphasising that the newspaper concerned was duty-bound to first alert the police upon knowing of any such assassination plot instead of jumping to sensationalise unsubstantiated stories.

Dr Mahathir said: "If I see a person carrying a pistol, I will not report in the newspaper that I saw a pistol-toting man going out to kill someone."

"This is not the way. The proper way is to lodge a police report so that an arrest can be made."

"This was not done. Their priority was to sell the newspaper by sensationalising a story," he added.

In Kuantan, Abdullah said publishing unsubstantiated reports over something very serious, such as a plot to kill top leaders, was not good for the country.

Questioning the motive behind the publication of the report, Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said such stories would give rise to malicious speculation and dangerous theories.

"If those responsible for it have exclusive evidence, they should alert the police first," he told reporters after visiting flood-hit areas yesterday.

Abdullah said if the report was not true, then the paper was involved in rumour-mongering, adding that it would have serious repercussions.

"I have checked with Deputy IGP Datuk Tan Sri Jamil Johari and he said this is something new to him and he does not have any such information."

"The police are investigating and I expect a report soon," he said, adding that he would leave it to the police to take any action.