

28/12/2001

Another editor resigns

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - An editor of The Sun newspaper was suspended while another resigned today, a day after the daily was hauled up by the Home Ministry for publishing a report which claimed that the Prime Minister and his deputy were assassination targets.

The managing editor Chong Cheng Hai was suspended, while editor Andy Ng resigned this afternoon.

Yesterday, the daily's editor-in-chief H'ng Hung Yong resigned. It's chief news editor Robert Ho, reporter R. Manirajan and photographer Anita Md Nasir were suspended pending the daily's own internal investigations.

Meanwhile, police today quizzed Ho, Manirajan and Anita to shed some light on their investigations into the report of the alleged plot to assassinate Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The trio were summoned to the Federal police headquarters in Bukit Aman to have their statements recorded.

Manirajan, the writer of the controversial front page report which shocked the nation on Christmas Day, had his statement recorded for the first time yesterday.

Manirajan was summoned to Bukit Aman for the second time this morning for his statement to be recorded. Ho and Anita also had their statement recorded today.

Chong who was informed of his suspension later in the afternoon, attended a "editors' meeting" at the Home Ministry this morning.

Meanwhile Home Ministry secretary-general Datuk Seri Aseh Che Mat said his officers were in the midst of preparing a report on the news article.

Aseh said the ministry was still considering the form of action against the tabloid paper.

The Sun today published a front page apology to the Prime Minister and Abdullah, saying the Dec 25 article was without any foundation.

It read:

"The report published by us was based upon information that the authors of the said article believed to be reliable. We have, however, subsequently conducted further investigations and have ascertained and now recognise that there was no foundation to the allegations contained in the said article and they ought not to have been published. We sincerely and whole-heartedly regret that they were ever made.

"We hereby take this earliest opportunity of correcting our error and in expressing our unreserved and unqualified apology to our Prime Minister, YAB Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, YAB Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the Deputy Prime Minister, and their respective families. We also express our profound apology for the grave distress, hurt and embarrassment caused to them by the publication of the said article," the front page article today, headlined "Apology to PM and DPM", said.

On Christmas Day, The Sun carried a front page report which alleged that the police had uncovered a plot to assassinate Dr Mahathir and Abdullah.

The report among others said that a group of local politicians had hired a hitman to carry out the "job" in a month or two, and that the police were taking pre-emptive measures.

Both the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister's offices declined comment over the apology.

It was, however, understood that although the apology was not demanded

by any party, the Home Ministry viewed the apology as appropriate.

"It's a mitigating factor but a final decision, particularly if the paper is to be suspended or not rests with the Home Minister," a ministry source said.

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