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PM-Deny

DOW JONES'S REPORT ON MAHATHIR'S MEDIA CONFERENCE NOT TRUE, SAYS AIDE

KUALA LUMPUR, June 1 (Bernama) -- The prime minister's office has denied a report by AP-Dow Jones news wire that the media conference by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on his return from Jakarta here today was "hastily called".

"It is not correct," the prime minister's assistant press secretary, Sufi Yusoff, said when contacted by Bernama.

The full text of the Dow Jones newsflash reads:

"Judging by hastily called media conference around 0330 GMT for local media, PM Mahathir expected to make major announcement today; markets likely to be jittery amid mounting speculation (Tun) Daim (Zainddin) may resign (as Finance Minister).

"While initial plan was for briefing exclusively for official government-owned media, other local media organisations were invited less than one hour before it's due to start; foreign media not allowed to attend briefing, Mahathir holding media conference on return from G15 meeting in Jakarta. KLCI now down 0.1 per cent at 572.1."

Sufi clarified that Dr Mahathir's media conference mentioned in the AP-Dow Jones report was actually a normal media conference held every time the prime minister returned from an overseas trip and open to local media.

In this case, the prime minister had returned from Jakarta where he attended the Group of 15 (G15) developing nations Summit.

Sufi said it was not true that the local media organisations were invited less than an hour before the start of the media conference.

"The invitation was conveyed through the national news agency, Bernama, yesterday, May 31, 2001," he said.

He said the reason only the official media was invited earlier was because the prime minister was expected to arrive at 1.15am (June 1, 2001) which warranted only a photo coverage of his arrival.

Since the flight was rescheduled to 11am today, a media conference was called for the local media which had been the norm and was nothing out of the ordinary, he said.

Immediately after receiving the information from the Prime Minister's office, Bernama sent out a message to its subscribers at 2.44pm yesterday about Dr Mahathir's flight being rescheduled to land at 1.15am.

Later, when the Prime Minister's office confirmed that Dr Mahathir's time of arrival had been changed from 1.15am to 11am, Bernama sent out another message at 4.23pm yesterday.

The prime minister's change of flight schedule was also repeated in Bernama's daily news coverage schedule.

Sufi said that as such, it was not correct for AP-Dow Jones to say that the local media organisations were invited less than one hour before the start of Dr Mahathir's media conference.

He said it was also not correct to say that Dr Mahathir was expected to make a major announcement.

"Dow Jones' newsflash that the prime minister is expected to make a major announcement is pure speculation. Such speculation and announcement without prior confirmation from this (PM's) office is irresponsible and hardly accurate," Sufi said.

At the media conference, Dr Mahathir dismissed speculation that Daim had resigned from the Cabinet.

Dr Mahathir said he had not received any letter from Daim on his

purported resignation.

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