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DPM accepts tabloid's apology

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today said he accepts the apology of The Sun newspaper over its report that there was a plot to assassinate him.

He said he did not ask for the apology, nor did he give any directive for the resignation of the two top editors of the tabloid.

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said he had left the matter to the Ministry secretary-general Datuk Seri Aseh Che Mat.

He added that it has not been decided if any further action would be taken.

"The Prime Minister has accepted their apology. I have accepted their apology," he said.

Asked if the newspapers' publishing licence would be suspended, he said: "I don't think so."

The Sun had, on Dec 27, apologised to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Abdullah for its Christmas Day front page report on the alleged assassination plot. Among others, the report said a group of local politicians had hired a hitman to carry out the "job" in a month or two.

Yesterday, Dr Mahathir said he was satisfied with the resignation of the two top editors of The Sun.

On the police questioning the reporters and editors, Abdullah said they just wanted to know the source of information and why the newspaper had played up the story under a banner headline.

"It (the questioning) won't take long," he said.

The daily's editor-in-chief H'ng Hung Yong and editor Andy Ng have resigned. Its managing editor Chong Cheng Hai, chief news editor Robert Ho, reporter R. Manirajan and photographer Anita Md Nasir were suspended.

They are being questioned by police.

Abdullah was speaking to reporters after presenting duit raya and gifts to 200 orphans at a function organised by the Association of Malay Journalists Malaysia and the Kuala Lumpur Motorcycle and Recreation Club.

Also present was association president Yazid Othman, who said there should be editorial representatives on The Sun committee holding an internal inquiry into the matter.

He said editorial experience was needed to understand how journalists worked.

Yazid also said the new chief editor or anyone placed in charge of editorial matters should have a journalism background.

He said he had been told that those running the newspaper now and those conducting the inquiry did not have editorial experience.

Lawyer Datuk V.K. Lingam, the company's deputy chairman, and executive director Frankie Tay are now "guiding The Sun in establishing itself as a responsible newspaper to the Nation", according to a report in the tabloid.

They were appointed on Dec 27, the report in today's daily added.

Meanwhile, in a Press statement, National Union of Journalists general secretary Hong Boon How demanded that the suspension of Manirajan and Anita be lifted immediately.

"The NUJ is of the view that they had performed their duties professionally without any malice in filing the article.

"They had acted under lawful instructions of their editorial bosses and

should not be made the `fall guys' in the company's efforts to escape negative publicity," he said.

He also said the NUJ regretted that its president Norila Md Daud's statement, aired over RTM1 on Dec 26, had not been used in an accurate manner.

Norila said the NUJ believed that The Sun would not have published the article without credible sources, and that it was written in good faith.

She also noted that journalists must follow the code of ethics and avoid speculative stories which could cause harm.

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