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PM saddened by report (HL)

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, saddened by a local newspaper report about a plot to assassinate him, 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 said after recording his New Year message at the Prime Minister's Office today.

The Sun yesterday frontpaged a story of a plot to assassinate the Prime Minister and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in a month or two involving a hired killer nicknamed "Raja Commando".

Bernama quoted Dr Mahathir as saying that the report, which was picked up and circulated worldwide by foreign news agencies, gave 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 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 today going out to kill someone.

"This is not the way," he said noting that a proper way would be to lodge a police report so that an arrest could be made. This is not done. The priority is how to sell the newspaper by sensationalising a story."

Meanwhile, Firdaus Abdullah reports from Kuantan that Abdullah has called on the media to be more responsible and not spread unsubstantiated rumours which could be detrimental to the nation.

"The media should appreciate their freedom and not abuse it. If a certain newspaper has such information, particularly on a very serious matter, then the information should be forwarded to the police.

"You (media) cannot spread rumours of that nature and if you have any information you must inform the police, otherwise you are creating a situation which is not in the best interest of the country and the people," Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said.

Speaking to the media after a half-day working visit to the flood-hit areas today, Abdullah said police had no information of the alleged assassination plot prior to the news report.

"The report is the only information we have and since it is is very serious police have started their investigations based on that," he said.

"We want to know why such a story was created, who created it... because it is very bad for the country." Abdullah said such reports could also prompt certain quarters to make all kinds of negative assumptions and allegations about Malaysia.

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