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Mahathir-Plot

REPORT ON ASSASSINATION PLOT SADDENS PM AS IT AFFECTS THE ECONOMY

PUTRAJAYA, Dec 26 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, saddened by a local newspaper report about a plot to assassinate him, said such sensationalised reporting can 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 today.

The Sun newspaper yesterday carried a page-one 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".

Dr Mahathir said the report, which was picked up and circulated world-wide by wire-agencies, now 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-totting 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 arrest could be made.

"This is not done. The priority is how to sell the newspaper by sensationalising a story," he said.

Meanwhile, The Sun, when contacted today confirmed that the tabloid's chief news editor Robert Ho was summoned to see the Home Ministry's Secretary-General Datuk Aseh Che Mat over the matter.

On another issue, Dr Mahathir said the government would allow the family of former Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao governor Nur Misuari to visit him in detention.

Misuari and six followers were arrested on Pulau Jampiras off Sabah on Nov 24 for entering Malaysia illegally when fleeing from southern Philippines after declaring war against Manila.

Kuala Lumpur and Manila are negotiating Misuari's deportation to the Philippines which is expected to be soon.

"I read today in the papers that his family is here. I don't see why they cannot see him because he is not really a prisoner in that sense except that he is here because he has no travel papers and as you know illegal immigrants are detained by the government and the period how long (he will be held here) is not fixed," he said.

On the National Union of Teaching Profession (NUTP)'s claim that schools segregated students according to race, the prime minister cautioned all parties against making statements that could whip up racial sentiments.

"Although we are free to talk about these issues, we have to bear in mind that before we start talking about these issues we need to have the real facts so we would not be emotional about it.

"And discussing it without the facts may result in unhappiness among the various races in the country," Dr Mahathir added.

-- BERNAMA

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