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Dr M refuses to be dragged into The Sun's internal problems

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Prime Minister today ticked off a reporter from The Sun who claimed that the Government was putting unnecessary pressure on the management of the newspaper.

"Ask them to come and tell me that I'm exerting pressure and I'll tell them to their faces what I feel about them," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He was responding to a question from reporter Claudia Theophilus who claimed that there were letters from readers and "others" which implied that Dr Mahathir and the Government were pressuring the management of the newspaper after it carried a report which alleged that there was a plot to kill him and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

She then said it was the impression of the management of the daily that there was pressure from Dr Mahathir and the Government on them, to which the Prime Minister said:

"Their impression... I don't care about their impression. They have never had any good thing to say about the Government. I don't care about their opinion... thank you."

The Prime Minister was speaking to the media after attending the People's Progressive Party's 2002 New Year open house at Putra World Trade Centre here this afternoon.

Dr Mahathir also refused to be dragged into The Sun's internal problem, between the management and its editorial team, which began soon after the report was published.

"That is their internal problem," he said when the same reporter insinuated that The Sun's new management team was on an internal witch-hunt.

The Sun on Christmas Day front-paged, with a black bold heading, a news report which alleged that police had uncovered a criminal plot to assassinate Dr Mahathir and Abdullah.

The police later denied knowledge of such a plot and immediately started investigations into the allegation.

Although initially Dr Mahathir laughed it off and urged the media to be more cautious in what they publish, the report's damaging effects emerged the next day when foreign news agencies picked up the report and transmitted it to their clients nationwide.

Dr Mahathir then voiced his regret that the report gave foreigners the impression that Malaysia was infested with terrorists who could make anyone their target.

As police investigations continued The Sun's management suspended the four journalists and editors who were reportedly involved in preparing the article, while the editor-in-chief-cum-executive director H'ng Hung Yong and editor Andy Ng resigned.

On Dec 27, the daily published a front page apology to Dr Mahathir, Abdullah and their families over the report on the assassination plot, admitting that it was without foundation.

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