

# PM hits out at magazine over threat letter

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**PUTRAJAYA:** Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has lambasted a New York business weekly for a letter, which the Prime Minister said threatened to write negative things about him and Malaysia after he refused to entertain its request for an interview.

The *Business Week* magazine, published by the McGraw-Hill Group, had sent the two-page letter dated Sept 8, which sought Dr Mahathir's response over claims that "Malaysia Inc benefited from government largesse and tolerated a culture of bribery and corruption" during his tenure as Prime Minister.

The letter said this included the alleged "large spending on grandiose public works projects and programmes designed to boost Malaysia's prestige abroad."

"The behaviour of the Western press is despicable," Dr Mahathir told reporters after checking the preparations for the upcoming Organisation of Islamic Conference summit at the Putrajaya Convention Centre yesterday.

"They wanted to interview me but I have no wish to be interviewed because the last time they did, they told a lot of lies.

"So, now they have sent me a letter that if I don't see them they are going to write all sorts of nonsense and nasty things about me and the country, about cronyism, about oppression, dictatorship and all that," he said.

That sort of behaviour, said Dr Mahathir was a norm among the Western media, which was willing to use threat and blackmail to get what they wanted.

"Even if you are nice to them, as I was nice to them before, they still write nasty things. So, is that the freedom of the press, to tell lies and to damage other people's country and reputation?" he asked.

He said the same was also true of the Western media's treatment of the latest alleged suspect of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in Singapore.

He said the case that was reported in Singapore had been categorised by the World Health Organisation as non-SARS because the patient did not show any sign of suffering from pneumonia, even after undergoing three x-rays.

"Unfortunately, the Western press, as usual, went to town with the story and the share market suffered as a result.

Asked to comment on remarks by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan that the world body was undemocratic and that its world power structure was outdated, Dr Mahathir said he supported Annan's statement.

The Prime Minister said although it was long overdue, Malaysia was happy that the UN Secretary-General has seen things from the point of view of developing countries.

Asked whether he felt that the UN should do away with the veto power, he said: "Perhaps powerful countries might not want that, but at least it should be modified. Let's say that if two permanent members together with three other members agree to stop something, then it should be given due consideration."

But what happens now, he said, was that one country with veto power could put a stop to something that had been agreed to by 180 other countries.