

10 SEP 2003

Mahathir-Letter

WESTERN PRESS AGAIN REARS ITS UGLY HEAD OVER MALAYSIA

PUTRAJAYA, Sept 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today deplored the Business Week magazine for threatening to write nasty things about the country and its leadership.

Stressing that the behaviour of the Western press was despicable, he said: "I've now received a letter from Business Week which threatens me. They wanted to interview me but I have no wish to be interviewed by them."

The letter dated Sept 8, he said, threatened that if he did not see them, then "they are going to write all sorts of nonsense and nasty things about cronyism, oppression, about dictatorship and all that."

Speaking in disgust, Dr Mahathir said: "That's the Western press for you. They threaten you, they blackmail you, and when you refuse to do what they want you to do, then they will write nasty things."

Nasty things about him and Malaysia would still be written even if "you are nice to them", he said after attending a briefing on preparations for the upcoming 10th Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit at the Putrajaya Convention Centre here.

The letter 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.

This, the letter said, allegedly included "large spendings on grandiose public works projects and programmes designed to boost Malaysia's prestige abroad."

The letter appeared to have been written in an arrogant manner when the prime minister was asked to contact the magazine's Singapore bureau by this afternoon.

Dr Mahathir's disclosure of the content of the letter came unexpectedly right at the end of the media conference after finishing his answer about the reported new SARS case in Singapore.

"So that is the freedom of the press -- to tell lies and to damage other people's countries and reputation," he said.

Business Week is published in New York by The McGraw Hill Companies. The Asia Edition of Business Week has a reported circulation of more than 60,000.

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