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A black day for journalism

SHOULD the New York-based Business Week have threatened the Prime Minister for an interview? Of course, not. It is offensive, unethical, unacceptable and deplorable. While it is good journalistic practice to give your subject the right to defend his or her position, this should not take the form of a threat. When it does, there is no doubting that desperation is the dynamics behind the impertinence. Any media, which uses bad Press as a means to a story has subverted the principle of objectivity. To compromise this is to destroy the concept of the "Fourth Estate", which makes the media a necessary component of democracy, an institution that checks and balances the power of governments. Freedom of the Press is not intended to create media despots.

By its action, the Business Week can no longer be uncritically viewed as an accurate source of investment information. We never had. Now, whatever the magazine had intended to publish about Malaysia in relation to the threat cannot be seen as uncoloured by prejudice. Nor can it, ever again, be regarded as a conduit of accurate information. Every reader will be asking the question: How many more writers in the magazine's stable will stoop to questionable practices in their ardour for a story?

Business Week has obviously forgotten that a magazine thrives or dives on an immaculate reputation for accurate and unbiased information. Having claimed such salubrious readership, it should well realise this simple fact. It should remember that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is no less, if not more, pithy than the 60,000 luminaries it claimed and that, in fact, these 60,000 hang on to his every word in their endeavour to find a place to put their money. His mouth is where their money is. It is, therefore, outrageous that the magazine can threaten with impunity a head of government who has been democratically elected for as long as Malaysians can remember.

And, this newspaper is irate not for patriotism only. It is, too, a black day when a purportedly serious print media takes arrogance to new lows. No doubt the sensationalism caused is good marketing. But, credibility is to serious journalism as oxygen is to life.