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National leaders hit out at 'Business Week' over adverse articles threat

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - National leaders today said it was unprofessional and unethical of international magazine Business Week to threaten to write adverse articles after it failed to secure an interview with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

They also said the New York-based magazine's demands for Dr Mahathir's immediate response to the alleged culture of cronyism and corruption in the country, did not deserve a reply.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein today lambasted Business Week, describing the magazine's actions as irresponsible.

"What the magazine has done is totally unacceptable. They have a hidden agenda," he said referring to the Prime Minister's revelation yesterday that the magazine had threatened to write "nasty things" if he did not meet them or failed to respond to their allegations.

Dr Mahathir had told reporters that the magazine had sought an interview with him, which he declined.

He said they then wrote him a letter, dated Sept 8, through their Singapore bureau correspondent Michael Shari, demanding an immediate response and threatening to write all about cronyism, oppression and dictatorship, if he did not do so.

Hishammuddin said the western media seemed obsessed with the culture of "issuing threats" to leaders in developing countries.

"They do not acknowledge views from countries like ours and are bold enough to blackmail our Prime Minister," he said in Seremban, after chairing a meeting on preparations for Sukma.

He said the magazine had gone overboard and should understand that Press freedom should be tempered by responsibility and professionalism.

He said Dr Mahathir had made the right decision not to entertain the magazine's request.

Here in Kuala Lumpur, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar called the magazine's conduct improper.

"Surely one understands that if you refuse to give an interview because you see no relevance for it to be conducted, then it is your right.

"Therefore it is improper for any magazine or any journalist to write a letter subsequently threatening to write nasty things if they are not granted an interview.

"It does not speak well of the media world or journalism, which is supposed to represent objectivity and professionalism," he said after the official launch of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference business forum and event partners signing ceremony at Nikko Hotel today.

In Kuantan, Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob said the magazine's threats against Dr Mahathir Mohamad were unprofessional and demonstrated the childishness of its editorial management.

"It is also clear that the magazine does not know how to respect others' wishes.

"Their actions are in great contrast to the view that western media is professional.

"Obviously they picked the wrong person to mess with," Adnan said at the opening of the 5th Asian Academy of Management conference here today.

On whether action would be taken against the magazine, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Chor Chee Heung said that while the Government had long adopted a liberal attitude, it would not hesitate to take firm action if

the country's national interests were involved, Bernama reported.

Shari could not be contacted for comment. Calls to him at the Business Week's Singapore bureau were not returned.

The weekly magazine, which has elicited much criticism since the Prime Minister's revelation, is published by The McGraw-Hill companies and has an Asian edition.

McGraw-Hill has in its stable various publications and companies.