

11/09/2003

`Business Week' threatens to write adverse articles about Dr M

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - The New York-based Business Week magazine has threatened Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that it would publish adverse articles about the Prime Minister, the country and the ruling party.

The magazine, which is published by The McGraw-Hill Companies, has written a letter to Dr Mahathir on Sept 8, through its Singapore bureau correspondent Michael Shari, and demanded the Prime Minister's immediate response to the alleged culture of cronyism and corruption in Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir, who revealed the threatening tone of the letter to reporters today, said the publication, known in Asia as Business Week Asia, reflected the attitude of the Western Press which continued to dictate to and slander leaders according to their whims and fancies.

"I just want to say this, the behaviour of the Western Press is despicable. I have now received a letter from Business Week which threatens me. They wanted to interview me but I have no wish to be interviewed by Business Week because the last time they did it they told a lot of lies.

"So now they have sent me a letter threatening me that if I don't see them or respond to their allegations, they are going to write all sorts of nonsense and nasty things about cronyism, oppression, dictatorship and all that. This is the Western Press for you. They threaten you, they blackmail you and when you refuse to do what they want you to do, they will write nasty things.

"If you're nice to them, as I was nice the last time, they still write nasty things. So, that is freedom of the Press ...to tell lies and to damage other people's countries and reputation," Dr Mahathir said at a Press conference after attending the preparatory briefing for the upcoming 10th Organisation of Islamic Conference Summit at the Putrajaya Convention Centre here.

In the rudely worded letter which gave the Prime Minister less than 48 hours to respond, Shari among others claimed that he was in the midst of writing a "sensitive" article on the upcoming leadership transition in Malaysia.

He also spelt out a thinly veiled threat to the Prime Minister by saying that the article would also focus on "lavish spendings on grandiose public works projects and programmes designed to boost Malaysian prestige abroad and the construction of the Kuala Lumpur International Airport, the Petronas Twin Towers and the Multimedia Super Corridor".

The Western Press had made the same allegations on numerous occasions although the issues have been dealt with by the Government time and time again.

The Singapore-based writer who boasted in his letter that Business Week Asia enjoyed a circulation of "more than 60,000 cabinet ministers, chief executives and international investors" also pointed out the publication's view that the New Economic Policy had bred cronyism in Malaysia.

McGraw-Hill has in its stable various publications and companies, including the Standard and Poor's rating agency.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, who was asked to comment on the threat by the publication, said today the publication had no right to write such a nasty letter to the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

"Malaysians have every right to be angry with such rude and unbecoming attitude of the Western Press. They do not respect freedom, democracy and

they want to interpret democracy and freedom according to their own standards. This is very wrong.

"We should take stock of what we should do and what action we can take against such irresponsible and arrogant media who behave as though they know everything," he responded.

Asked if any action could be initiated against such publications, Syed Hamid said the Foreign Ministry would study the matter before any further action.