

Changed British attitude

NST 12 MAR 1983

LONDON, Fri. — British government leaders and businessmen have shown a clear change of attitude towards Malaysia, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Interviewed at the Malaysian High Commission here after his meeting with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Foreign Secretary Francis Pym and British businessmen, he noted: "Relations between Malaysia and Britain appear to be brighter than before. It is now placed on a new footing."

He said there was a possibility that the Government would review the buy-British-last policy to see if it was to be continued, revised, relaxed or dropped.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir continued: "Things are certainly looking brighter now than before," he said.

"I find that there is a definite change in the attitude of British government leaders as well as the business community.

"They are very anxious to restore the close economic ties between the two countries and also to renew and improve their relations with Malaysia.

"In this kind of situation, and after meeting Mrs Thatcher, I will report back to the Cabinet. It is only fair that there is a reciprocal arrangement or action on our part in the light of this change of attitude.

"I don't know what action we will take. It has to be discussed in the Cabinet. We will consider whether the policy should stay, or it should be revised, relaxed a little or dropped completely.

"These are the possibilities. The Cabinet will have to decide. After all it was the Cabinet which approved the policy so it is not proper for me alone to decide."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he was happy that British companies had now understood Malaysian aspirations.

"I am glad that they understand and promise to abide by the rules such as the question of restructuring."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, who arrived here on Wednesday for a five-day private visit, was the guest at a dinner at 10 Downing Street. Be-

By SAAD HASHIM

fore the dinner, he and Mrs Thatcher had an hour-long discussion.

Asked about his impressions of Mrs Thatcher, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said: "Well, she is a very good host. I felt very comfortable and we could talk very freely."

He said people might be a bit surprised to learn of the decision to review the policy after his meeting with the British leader.

"Some people may think I feel grateful to Mrs Thatcher but I am not concerned with what people say. The question is we can see for ourselves what the British are doing to change their attitude.

"We can feel the change quite clearly and it is not only shown to me but also to other people who come to London and they all tell me that there has certainly been a change in the British attitude towards Malaysia."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir made it clear that the deci-

sion to review the policy would not affect the Look East policy.

"The Look East policy does not mean we will buy everything from the East and give everything to Japan and Korea. I have explained this to the Japanese and they understand that.

"We only want to learn how a country like Japan can develop. If they could do it, we can do."

The Prime Minister explained that the buy-British last policy was enforced because Malaysia had lost patience with the old British attitude and it was the reaction to the Guthrie takeover that provided the last straw.

"Although I was not educated in England, during the War I was very pro-British and anti-Japanese. But like other people, my attitude changed during the Malayan Union period.

"I am not anti-British. I only disagree with some of the British policies and some of the things they did which I need not elaborate. The British know it."

On management training for civil servants in British companies, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said this was agreed upon a year ago. I said many servants were managing government-owned companies. "If they don't understand business management, they are going to mess up things like they did in the past."