

Time for rakyat to rally behind leadership: Dr M

By AHMAD A. TALIB

THE Prime Minister last night assured his fellow citizens that his multi-racial government is "fair to everyone" even though some of the policies and decisions made may seem "unfair" to certain quarters.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said some of the "fair" decisions may not appear so to some people, but this is inevitable "because we really have to be fair to all."

Dr Mahathir gave this commitment when addressing a dinner given in his honour by the Associated Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur. The chamber said the dinner was to welcome the Prime Minister home after his "long journey to China" last month.

Earlier, chamber president Tan Sri Wee Boon Ping, referring to greater participation by Bumiputera businessmen in the China trade, said the chamber is willing to cooperate but "on the understanding that the interests of traditional Malaysian importers of Chinese goods will be protected."

The chamber, he said, understands and appreciates the government's policy of encouraging more Bumiputera participation in this sector.

Dr Mahathir said the country is facing one of its most difficult periods, but this can be collectively overcome if all citizens rally behind the leadership to improve general efficiency and increase productivity.

All the country's major

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commodities are experiencing a drop in prices at about the same time, thus creating severe hardship right down the line. Only efficient and prudent management can minimise and finally eliminate the country's economic ills, he said.

He advised the business community to adopt cost saving measures by "spending within their means," produce more but at reduced costs and diversify into other manufacturing areas.

Most of Malaysia's manufactured items are costly, and cannot effectively compete internationally. Malaysian manufacturers can only sell their products locally, and even that only with considerable government protection, he said.

Manufacturers have been pampered, some-

times excessively, Dr Mahathir said. "It's high time manufacturers diversify." After all, he added, the government has provided them with sufficient incentives to do so.

Tan Sri Wee said a healthy and equitable trade relationship between two countries can be developed provided there are "minimum restrictions" on movement of goods and people between the two.

"I hope the government will minimise or abolish trade restrictions soonest possible so that the private sector can effectively exploit the vast potentials of the China market.

"With the easing of trade restrictions, I'm sure the volume of trade will increase very substantially and this will benefit Malaysian businessmen of all races."