

'End debate on sensitive issues'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — The Prime Minister today called for an end to emotional public debate on sensitive issues. He said the real threat facing the country is the economic recession.

All energies should now be directed towards formulating new business ethics and improving productivity rather than activities that could cause the national economy to deteriorate further.

He said public interest must always be considered in raising an issue. The people should not be carried away by the Western democratic concept of individual freedom.

On the controversy which began with the Selangor MCA resolution (about three weeks ago) that Malays, Chinese and Indians were immigrants, he said the matter had already been resolved

and "we should not question anyone's status anymore".

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysians of Chinese and Indian origin were *not foreign immigrants* and they possessed the same rights as other citizens.

This statement was greeted with thunderous applause from the 2,000 MCA delegates and observers at the Dewan San Choon of the Wisma MCA, where the Prime Minister was opening the 33rd general assembly of the party.

When the delegates were quiet again, he said: "Historically, the Malays and other Bumiputeras are the indigenous people of this country.

"This has been agreed to in a meeting and the matter should not be raised again."

Dr Mahathir said in view of the

multi-racial nature of the country, it was only fair that certain sensitive issues should be diplomatically settled through established channels.

There were established forums in the Government and the Barisan Nasional where these issues could be dispassionately resolved. This prevented them from causing long-lasting harm to society as would happen if the issues were emotionally discussed in public.

Also present at the opening ceremony were Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba, Gerakan president Datuk Dr Lim Keng Yaik and other representatives of the Barisan Nasional component parties.

On the economy, the Prime Minister said the recession had exposed several weaknesses and malpractices. They had to be removed so that with the ex-

pected recovery "our economy will be on a healthier foundation".

There was a need to exercise more care when entrusting managers with certain functions. Their duties and functions should be subjected to constant review.

"We should not be motivated by profit to the extent that we are easily taken in by sweet talk," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there was thus a need for a new code of ethics for company managers. This would create a new breed of managers who were professional, ethical, trustworthy and unmotivated by greed.

He said those with their own companies should be barred from managing public companies involved in the same business.

"It is unfortunate that wherever there are signs of an economic recovery, something happens to undermine the political climate and the national economy.

"We are too often taken up by the so-called democratic processes to the extent that we ignore whether they benefit us or not."

He said the country had been through this before but there were still people who did not seem to learn anything from this. Thus, George Santayana was right when he said that those who "do not learn from the lessons of history are condemned to repeat their mistakes."

Malaysia had its own characteristics. When the people chose the democratic system of adminis-

tration, they had to adapt to the system. They also had to modify the system where necessary so that it was suitable for this country.

"Democracy for democracy's sake is useless if it results in oppressive anarchy and the destruction of our society. It is not the system that is important. It is the good that it can bring society that really matters," he said.

Dr Mahathir said even the old democracies had undergone changes whenever it was necessary. In view of this, he saw no reason why Malaysia could not make changes to its system.

"Thus, we should not be quick to condemn our country as not being 100 per cent democratic as other countries. We should not be ashamed that we have not conformed to certain concepts of other countries.

"It is our right to decide on our own system according to the uniqueness of our country," he said.