

SURPRISE AS DR M BRUSHES ASIDE PROTOCOL

Prime Minister turns auctioneer

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — The *Malam Anugerah 87* last night was one of the most memorable occasions for petty traders.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy, Encik Ghafar Baba, graced the function hosted by the Malay Hawkers' and Petty Traders' Association and both regaled the audience with their hilarious childhood stories.

Dr Mahathir surprised about 1,000 people there when he brushed aside protocol, walked to the microphone on the stage and insisted he be given the opportunity to become an auctioneer.

And he turned out to be a good one at that. He took less than two minutes to auction off a hamper to the highest bidder for \$330 that he had earlier won.

Earlier, the Prime Minister said he

could speak about business because he was once a petty trader.

"I sold bananas, *goreng pisang* and firewood at Pekan Rabu (a market in Alor Star) when I was young.

Gold medal

"When I meet petty traders there now, I tell them not to think that Pekan Rabu is backward. It has produced a Prime Minister," he said, adding that being petty traders did not mean they could not achieve greater successes.

On the association's appeal to the Government for a piece of land for its building, Dr Mahathir said: "We have to talk about that after April 24 (the Umno general assembly). I cannot mention it now as we have the Committee of Ethics."

Before the dinner ended, Encik Ghafar was named *Bapa Pembangunan Penjaja* and was awarded a gold medal by the association, which has about 300,000 members, for his contribution to petty traders in the country.

The Deputy Prime Minister said this was the first medal he had received.

He said he would continue to help petty traders irrespective of whether he was inside or outside the Government.

On his childhood business experience, Encik Ghafar said: "If Dr Mahathir sold *goreng pisang*, I used to sell *ubi kayu* and had to cycle for 32km (20 miles) every day.

"So now you have two former petty traders holding the posts of Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister," he added.