

PM: Many Bumis may have 'sold' their names

Puzzle over big ASN purchases

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ALOR STAR, Sat. — The Prime Minister today expressed concern that the sharp rise in the purchase of Amanah Saham Nasional (ASN) units over the last three months could have been due to some Bumiputeras selling their "names" to certain groups out to cash in on the scheme.

He said it would also be very unfortunate if these people sold their units come Jan 2, when the stock would be transacted based on the prevailing market value.

This would cause a setback to the Government's objective of helping Bumiputeras raise their economic status and increase their participation in the economy, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said it came as a surprise to him that the purchase of ASN units pushed investments up to \$1 billion between October and December, from between \$200 million and \$300 million before the period.

This was something unusual because before the Aug 12 announcement to transact the ASN shares on the open market, many Bumiputeras had often pleaded that they did not have the money to buy a larger number of shares.

Many were suddenly rushing to top up their investments to the maximum of \$50,000, Dr Mahathir told reporters when elaborating on the point he made in his speech when opening the general meeting of the Malaysian Malay Chamber

of Commerce and Industry today.

"There was one instance during that period when a group of people brought \$300,000 in cash to an ASN office to top up their investments. Where did the money come from?"

He said some of the vast amounts could have been obtained by the Malays through selling their land or other property, but according to the Government's observation not many of them had done this.

He said there was no way the Government could control the purchase of the shares.

He regretted that some Malays had, through their action, caused a setback to the Government's plan to raise their economic status.

Sale for gain

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said he was told of instances when people lined up at the offices of ASN agents with large amounts of cash and clutching their ASN books.

"But some people were seen waiting for them in the distance," he said.

He believed certain groups were making use of Bumiputeras to reap profits from the scheme reserved for them.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir felt that Bumiputeras would be tempted to sell their ASN shares for a gain when they were traded on the open market next year.

If many Bumiputeras were to dispose of their shares, the Bumiputera stake in major corporations, which currently amounts to 20 per cent, would be reduced, he said.

He said this was because Bumiputera share holdings in big corporations like Guthrie, Harrison and Crossfield and Boustead were acquired through the ASN scheme.