

# PM: They must

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Government will not do anything to reverse its decision not to give new contracts to British companies until the British Press learns to speak the truth.

The Prime Minister said he had the power to reverse the decision but added that the power was exercised together with Cabinet members.

He said this when he was asked what could be done to reverse the decision, especially when he was told that he had the power to do so.

He said: "I have the power but that power is exercised together with Cabinet members. But I'm not going to do anything and my Cabinet is not going to do anything until the British Press learns to speak the truth.

"It is so hard for them to speak the truth. For example, television — whenever they tape anything I say — they only pick out something that will reflect badly on Malaysia. And that is screened.

"The rest of what I say will not be screened. I'm quite sure this is going to happen also."

Dr Mahathir had earlier broken fast with 220 orphans and handicapped children. The function was organised by the Welfare Body of Wives of Ministers and Deputy Ministers (Bak-ti).

Asked what he felt could be done to try to resolve this dispute, the Prime Minister said: "The British Press should get their facts right. Don't go around saying that we are corrupt, that we received US\$50,000 when these things never happened.

"They didn't even bother to check whether there was an aluminium smelter or not. There is none. And this

man says he gave US\$50,000 to somebody who claims to represent me and then deposits it into a Swiss bank. Well, you better charge him."

Dr Mahathir said: "Tell the truth! Is it so difficult to tell the truth? For example, when the British Government gave us a loan, say that it's a loan and not a grant.

"And of course, when we were negotiating to buy arms, we were also negotiating to do a lot of other things. Are we supposed to stop negotiating for other things because we are trying to buy arms?"

"If the British had told us that while negotiating for the purchase of arms you should not do anything at all, then it's okay ... then we probably won't buy the arms and we go for other things. We can buy from other people."

When he was asked to comment on the issue's implications on Malaysia-British relations, Dr Mahathir said: "We have nothing against the British Government. We have nothing against the British business people or the British people.

"What we can't stand is the kind of lies that are being spread by the British Press. Today, we learn that these lies have been printed all over the world and my reputation had been besmirched by the British Press, and I have no means to correct that.

"I can't go all over the world and say that I am not corrupt. It is so easy to say other people are corrupt ... but where is the proof? This man comes up and talks about a project that does not even exist.

"Why didn't you tell the people in Britain that there was no aluminium smelter and that this man must have given the money to somebody who conned him ... but instead you publish this as fact.

"And some wise guy in some club says — 'Oh, of

course, those bloody natives are corrupt'. What's so difficult about telling the truth. If it's wrong for the British to lend us money for the Pergau project, take it out on the British Government, why pick on me?"

"(It seems that my father was not promoted, that I couldn't study law ... what rubbish ... it becomes so personal. My father was promoted. He rose from a teacher to become the headmaster of the first English school in my State.

"He was promoted. And subsequently he became senior auditor, that was a promotion. Why pick on this kind of things? They say I am thick-skinned but I am prickly. How do you become prickly and thick-skinned at the same time? Either you're thick-skinned or prickly — not both at the same time. It's quite a feat..."

Asked whether Malaysia would continue receiving British aid, the Prime Minister said: "For the moment, we are not taking anything from the British.

"Whenever they ask for or ... propose a project, they always suggest that the British Government can offer some help. Okay if it's a soft loan ... that helps. If it's a grant, that also helps.

"But if they don't do that, their project will be too costly and you'll probably give the project to other people.

"The Japanese lend us money, no strings attached. We can get other contractors from outside ... but British loans or grants are tied to giving projects to British companies."

He added that the Government would honour its obligations on signed contracts. "We honour our obligations. But why should we give contracts but in the end we get hammered for it with a lot of lies?"

Asked if there was anything that the British Government could do to resolve the issue, including the possibility of an apology from

British Prime Minister John Major, Dr Mahathir said:

"No, No, I'm not asking him to apologise. As I said, I have no quarrel with him. I don't ask him to apologise. My piece is with the British Press. I'm not asking him to do anything. I'm not asking anybody else to do anything.

"But it's about time that the British Press at least prints the truth. Every time they talk about Malaysia, they say — 'Oh, controlled press'. We have in Malaysia newspapers which support the Government. But we also have newspapers which are very anti-government except that they are in the vernacular Press.

"They are in Chinese or Malay, and you don't read them, and you say we control the Press. Having newspapers which support the Government does not mean we control.

"Even in Britain, you have newspapers which support the Conservative and Labour parties. That doesn't mean that you control ... but there are people controlling the Press.

"The owners control, the journalists control, the editors control. If the editors don't behave, they get kicked out. When (Rupert) Murdoch took over *The Times*, the first thing he did was to kick out the editor. That's controlling.

"But there is no such thing as a free Press. In any case, a free Press is free to tell the truth, not to concoct lies! If that is what is meant by Press freedom, then I'm sorry for you."

The Prime Minister then said that he was told that Malaysia would suffer and that it was making a mistake. He said: "We will see who suffers. There is some idea among the British papers that if we don't give fat contracts to British companies, then we cannot develop this country.

"For 37 years we have developed this country with less than no help from the

# Speak the truth first

British. You may not agree with me, but I think we have managed. Would you please report the truth of what I say?"

Asked whether he agreed that raising the issue was a mistake, Dr Mahathir said: "I think people should at least know the facts if they want to publish anything."

"In the first place, the British Government never gave us a grant of £240 million. If they give, we would be very happy to receive it ... but it was a loan which we

have to pay back. At least the British papers should get it right that it was a loan and not a grant.

"There is a world of difference between a loan and a grant. But apparently the British Government did not point out these things, and so they keep on harping about this grant given to Malaysia.

"Get your facts right. And then this man who said that he bribed me for a project to build an aluminium smel-

ter. In the first place, nobody is building an aluminium smelter in Malaysia. Certainly not the Government, so obviously he got everything wrong.

"And if he confesses to bribing me, I think he should be arrested for bribing people and charged for bribery. And then you can prove that I have accepted bribe, than you can charge me too."

His wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, who is also Bakti president,

joined him in giving away presents and *duit raya* to their guests.

Besides Bakti, the event was co-sponsored by Landmarks Berhad, Trimula Development Sdn Bhd, Mobikom Sdn Bhd and Carcosa Seri Negara.

The children were from the Tengku Budriah Orphanage in Cheras, Tasputra Perkim, Darul Kifayah Orphanage and the Cheras Rehabilitation Centre for the Handicapped.