

# Closer links with all businessmen

By Syed Nadzri and Alex Choong

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Malaysia Incorporated concept had brought the Government closer to all businessmen and not just a select few.

The Prime Minister said it was the duty of the Government to be associated with businessmen because under the concept both sides worked together to develop the country.

"Businessmen have access to this Government. We are not stand-offish to them," he said at a Press conference after opening the 23rd Gerakan general assembly here this morning.

Dr Mahathir said this in reply to a foreign journalist who had asked about "the perception that huge government contracts were awarded only to those close to Umno politicians".

He also asked whether there was a conflict of interest in the award of such

contracts.

Dr Mahathir said contract applications were processed either through open tenders or negotiated tenders.

"Everybody has a chance to bid — even foreign companies ... but everybody who fails will consider it unfair but those who got (the contracts) will say it is fair. It is a normal phenomenon."

Asked whether the Malaysia Incorporated concept would bring success, Dr Mahathir said the Government and the private sector had a duty to work together to develop the country.

"You do not know how many people who are friendly with the Government have failed (to get a contract). Nobody cares about those who have failed.

"But anybody who succeeds is said to be well-connected. The truth is all businessmen in Malaysia are well-connected with the Government because that is our policy under the concept of Malaysia Incorporated.

On Al Arqam, the Prime Minister said the movement had deviated from the teach-

ings of Islam.

"We are not worried about them but in this country we do not allow deviationist teachings.

"And this man (movement leader Ashaari Muhammad) claims the Prophet came to see him and even called him Sir," he said, adding that the Government allowed the movement to operate because they did not deviate from Islamic teachings in the early days.

However, having won his followers' confidence, Ashaari now claimed to be the Messiah. Dr Mahathir said: "We don't believe he is the Messiah."

Regarding a recent report that quoted Ashaari as calling for a referendum to test his popularity, the Prime Minister said there is no provision for a referendum in the country, just because one man thinks he is fit to become the Prime Minister.

"If he wants to contest in an election, he can contest properly but don't try to bring in deviationist teachings."

Asked whether he would allow Al Arqam to become a

political party, Dr Mahathir said the movement could register as a political party on condition that it did not propagate deviationist teachings.

On DAP's attempts to wrest control of the Penang State Government through Tanjung 3, the Prime Minister said:

"DAP will harp on communal issues to win votes. And such issues would surface in Tanjung 3, Tanjung 4, Tanjung 5 and Tanjung 10 ... in fact, everytime there is a general election, there will be a Tanjung with a number."

Dr Mahathir did not dismiss the role of the opposition in nation building but hit out at the DAP, which had been destructive rather than constructive.

On Pas moves to capture Terengganu, the Prime Minister said the party was merely eyeing the State coffers of half a billion ringgit annually.

"The opposition is using religion to achieve its political goals in order to get the power to control the State's wealth."