

# PM: Bring down prices or lose free port status

By Saiful Azhar Abdullah and Noor Adzman Baharuddin

KUAH (Langkawi), Sun. — The Government will abolish Langkawi's duty-free status if profiteering among local businessmen continues, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

If Langkawi is to continue to be an attractive and leading tourist destination, goods sold on the island should always be cheaper than those sold on the mainland, Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir said: "What is the use of the duty-free status if goods sold here are more expensive than those available on the mainland.

"When we accorded the duty-free status to the island in 1987, we wanted Langkawi to sell goods cheaper and become a leading tourist destination."

He said this when opening the RM15 million Jetty Point complex here.

He was accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Osman Aroff, several State Executive Councillors, Jetty Point managing director Dahlan Mohd Rashid and several heads of departments.

Dr Mahathir said unless the business community was willing to lower the prices of their goods, the Government would not hesitate to abolish the island's duty-free status.

"I hope all traders will take note of this," he said.

Despite his earlier warnings, the Prime Minister said he was still not satisfied with the prices of goods on the island and profiteering was rampant among the traders.

He said he had reminded the traders numerous times to bring down the prices and make the goods cheaper than the mainland and other taxed areas.

"But they continue to profiteer. I am not satisfied with the situation. It is not fair to the tourists," said Dr Mahathir.

This time around Dr Mahathir wanted every party involved to take note of his latest reminder to bring down the prices of goods on the island.

"Let's not make too much profit," he said.

He said it was a good business practice to always have more clients than to make huge profits from a small number of clientele.

Later, speaking to newsmen after officiating the ground-breaking ceremony of Koperasi Usaha Ber-

PLEASE TURN TO  
PAGE 5, COL 1

# PM: New complex proves success of economic policy

[ ] FROM PAGE ONE

satu (M) Bhd's RM30 million tourism and hotel school at Teluk Baru. Dr Mahathir said he would constantly remind Langkawi traders to keep the prices down.

Despite regular price checks, some traders were still adamant, adding that the prices should be kept in line with the recent Budget announcement.

Asked what measures the Government could take if the traders refused to heed to his advice, the Prime Minister said there were ways to tackle the problem.

"I have to remind them because there are times they forget," he said, adding that the Government must take action to curb inflation.

On the widespread use of duty-free signboards by Langkawi traders, Dr Mahathir said the traders had been reminded not to use such them.

"We will erect a huge billboard at the Kuah jetty informing everyone that Langkawi is a duty-free island, just like what we did at the airport," he added.

On claims by traders that the high prices were due to the high transport charges, Dr Mahathir said even if this was so, the increase should be minimal.

"If the transport charges increased by 10 per cent, the price of goods should increase by only one per cent and not 10 per cent," he said.

The Prime Minister said prices at the Jetty Point complex should be used as a yardstick for the prices of goods sold in Langkawi.

"I hope the items available at the shopping complex are cheaper than those on the mainland and in other parts of Langkawi."

"This way too, visitors can always compare the prices of goods sold elsewhere on the island with those found at Jetty Point," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Dahan's success in turning Jetty Point into a leading shopping centre in Langkawi, proved the success of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and the National Development Policy.

He said there were talks and allegations that the NEP only benefited his friends, but added that everybody was his friends.

"Those with money, and those without money ... they're all my friends ... even the deprived lot (*kucing kurap*)," he said.

Dr Mahathir also hoped those responsible for the development of Langkawi would not wait for him when making decisions on the island's development.

"I hope the officers will not wait until I say 'yes'. Don't wait for the PM (Prime Minister), (the) PM has other things to do," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would continue to help more Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera entrepreneurs to become successful.

"It is the Government's intention to encourage more Bumiputeras to be involved in business. We also want as many Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras among the middle-income earners," he said.

The creation of many Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras in the middle-income group would help eliminate any economic imbalance among the races which would subsequently get rid of any jealous tendencies among them.

"Sure there are failures among Bumiputera businessmen but the number who have succeeded is higher," Dr Mahathir said, adding that Bumiputeras were among those running major businesses in the country.

He said Bumiputeras only needed opportunities to become successful in business.

"I also believe other races support the nation's economic policy and co-operate with the Government to create Bumiputeras who are successful," he said.

Dr Mahathir said once there were many rich Bumiputeras, God-willing, they would be able to buy many goods which they could never own before.

"This will bring about many benefits to both Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras," he said, adding that all races could then share the nation's wealth.

"I hope we will all work together to ensure fair distribution of the country's wealth."

Dr Mahathir and his wife later jointly opened the Langkawi Chocolate Fair 1994, held at the Jetty Point Complex.