

PM: Privatisation

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government would continue with its successful privatisation policy and assured the business sector that the Malaysia Incorporated policy would be pursued effectively.

In this regard, the Prime Minister said he has directed Ministers and Deputy Ministers to personally look into complaints made by the private sector with a view of overcoming their problems for the good of the country.

Dr Mahathir said this at the opening of the Trade and Industry Dialogue at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC).

The dialogue with the captains of industry is aimed at gathering inputs from the business sector for policy formulation.

The five-day dialogue is organised by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (Miti).

In his opening remarks, the Prime Minister said Malaysia would continue with its privatisation policy as it has proven to be a great success.

Besides creating business opportunities, the policy has managed to overcome the inadequacy of funds on the part of the Government to carry out infrastructural projects.

He said the concept was carried out all over the world but many countries had since given it up.

Among the major projects implemented through privatisation were the Kuala Lumpur International Airport, the North-South Expressway, the second Malaysia-Singapore link and the RM15 billion Bakun dam project.

He said: "We are able to build huge projects which otherwise would not have been possible if we were to depend on government funds. If we had depended on the Government we would not be able to build Bakun at all and if we wait for the funds, the cost would go up also."

Privatisation not only made possible more projects to be carried out, it also helped create new business activities.

He also paid tribute to the private sector for apparently having better expertise than the Government. This has resulted in the success of the policy, he said.

Dr Mahathir told the businessmen: "If you have any problem, you can refer them to the Ministers, Deputy Ministers or even the Prime Minister."

He said some officers declined to extend their assistance to the private sector, considering it as an enemy of the Government.

He said the Government was trying to erase this perception among civil servants as it considered the private sector a "friend" because the more revenue they made, the more the Government would benefit in terms of taxes.

He said the problem was that when he interfered in certain matters, his action would be seen as having vested interests.

However, the Prime Minister said it did not bother him what other people said.

He also said Malaysia had gone a long way to achieving its status as the 19th biggest trading nation in the world today.

"From an inward-looking nation depending only

on rubber and tin for its revenue, it has now gone worldwide, venturing into Latin America, Central Asia, and the so-called non-traditional areas like Africa and South Africa.

"We are also actively involved in trade with China, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and even Myanmar," he said adding that "we are now a world trader".

He said Malaysia's approach to globalising its activities had been very fruitful, adding that it was now in the midst of improving its air and sea transportation and increasing the efficiency of its ports to encourage more ships to call.

The problem, according to the Prime Minister, was that ships did not call at the ports especially Port

policy to continue

Klang as frequently as Malaysia would like.

He said there was no reason why Port Klang could not be a distribution centre like the Singapore port.

He urged manufacturers to export their products via Port Klang because as long as manufacturers continued to export their products via Singapore, ships would prefer to dock

in the republic instead of Port Klang.

He said efforts were also being made to expand the port to accommodate more ships.

On inflation, he said the Government was serious in curbing it and at the same time increase productivity.

He reiterated that any increase in wages must commensurate with the in-

crease in productivity.

Dr Mahathir also said that efforts at further reducing redtape in government departments were underway and civil servants had been encouraged to co-operate with the private sector.

On taxes, he said the Government would continue to impose them on the private sector but they would be reasonable.

Dr Mahathir also said the move to allow foreign university branch campuses in the country to use English as a medium of instruction would help Malaysians to improve their proficiency in the language and was not aimed at relegating the status of Bahasa Malaysia.

Furthermore, he said Malaysians should master more than one language.

"It would be difficult to be a world trader if Malaysians could master only the national language."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians should be able to command the language at a level where they could negotiate with other parties and make agreements in English with full confidence and understand what they were signing.

Otherwise, they could face legal action for signing something they did not understand.

He also said that allowing foreign universities to set up branches here could also help the Government save in education expenditure as presently, the Government spends about US\$30,000 (RM75,000) on each student it sends overseas.

The move would also enable the Government to have more control of its curriculum as the branches would be bound by Malaysian laws.

On the privatisation of some training centres, Dr Mahathir said this was to ensure that the institutions of higher learning had ample teaching staff because the Government could not afford to match the salaries offered in the current market.