

Dr M: Unfair to equate success in business with 'connections'

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Government's close relationship with the business community should not be construed as favouritism only towards certain individuals to make money.

He took to task critics, especially from the foreign Press, for drawing inference that successful businessmen were mainly those with the right "connections".

He said these critics should realise that some foreign dignitaries visiting Malaysia were even more blatant in endorsing and soliciting contracts for specific businessmen they brought along.

Dr Mahathir said in Malaysia, it was the close relationship between the Government and the private sector that had helped the country prosper but it was unfair to equate success in business with such connections.

"We admit there are connections, but it is with everyone and because of this we could prosper," he said at a Press conference after opening the Kuala Lumpur/Selangor Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry building in Jalan Ampang here.

He was asked about criti-

cisms which claimed that the Government's policy seemed to benefit only a certain group of businessmen rather than the business community as a whole.

"Whoever is successful is assumed to have connections. This is not targeted at certain individuals only because many of these people were previously unknown. But when they are successful, it is alleged that they have moved up because of the Government," he said.

Dr Mahathir cited Malaysia Airlines chairman Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli, Landmarks Bhd executive chairman Datuk Samsuddin Abu Hassan and Associated Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Tan Sri Wee Boon Ping as examples of businessmen having developed close relations with the Government after being successful.

"In the past, who knew Tajudin, Samsuddin or Wee? But if a person is successful, we will have contacts with him because he is successful.

"If anyone wants to succeed just by having (close) contacts with the Government but does not have the business acumen, he will never be able to make profits.

"We must know how to do

business first. We cannot succeed just because we know people. Of course, there are people who want to get rich by applying for import permits (APs)," he added.

Dr Mahathir also touched on the subject in his speech earlier, saying that the Government had nothing to hide by being close to businessmen.

He said it was in fact the duty of the Government to help the private sector do well.

"To those fond of accusing us of favouring certain businessmen, I would like to point out that whenever dignitaries from some foreign countries come here, they invariably bring with them businessmen and openly solicit business and contracts for these people. If that is not connection, I don't know what is.

"They (the dignitaries) even name the companies they are soliciting for. If we are to do the same, we are accused of favouritism," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the point to remember was that whenever someone in the private sector did well, the Government benefited too in terms of taxes collected.

The Government, he added, was realistic and was not

hiding anything.

The Prime Minister also noted that the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Chinese community as a whole had generally understood the need to adhere to Government policy.

He said he was glad that the Chinese community was giving its full co-operation towards efforts to improve the economic prospects of the other races.

"When we started our New Economic Policy, there was a lot of criticism. But today, because of the understanding from the Chinese, there is less (economic) disparity between the Chinese and the other communities," he added.

This, he said, gave rise to stability and provided the right climate for the country to prosper.

"Although there is no absolute harmony, there is relative harmony. And because of this, we can go about our own business without worrying about our safety or disruption in business," he added.

Also present at the function were Wee, Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Lee Guan Teik and its former president Gan Chin Weng.