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'Lists on projects and shares to dispel sinister suspicions'

UMNO president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the lists of beneficiaries of privatised projects and share allocations were released not only to show the extent of their distribution but also to stop sinister suspicions concerning them.

The Prime Minister, in his adjournment speech at the end of the Umno general assembly yesterday, said he was sorry that one of the lists contained the name of Umno Youth head Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who has since explained the situation.

The lesson from this, Dr Mahathir added, was that such matters were bound to raise suspicions until an explanation was given.

Ahmad Zahid, who was named as a shareholder in a project to redevelop Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukum in Kuala Lumpur, had pointed out in his winding up speech yesterday that he was merely a trustee in the company undertaking the project.

The whole point, Dr Mahathir said, was that it was easy for anyone to cast aspersions until the truth was out.

The Prime Minister said the allocation of shares and contracts was not given to one or two companies, so there was no question of cronyism or nepotism being practised.

Dr Mahathir said in his 17 years as Prime Minister, he would have made every member of his family very rich if he was to practise nepotism.

"Even when my son was asked to contest in the general election, I had said no because he was not suitable and the candidacy was given to someone else."

He said the issue of cronyism was always harped on by foreigners who would not accept the social engineering formula under the New Economic Policy.

"I challenge anyone to come forward and tell me whether there is any other country which has such social engineering programmes that benefit a large cross section of the people," he added.

Dr Mahathir said it had to be accepted that the NEP had created Malay millionaires but these people should not be scorned with jealousy because they too play their part in enhancing the economy.

He also said he was relieved that his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had explicitly declared his allegiance and loyalty to him as Umno president.

Dr Mahathir hoped that Anwar's pledge would put an end to talk of their differences which at times "hurt his ears".

"I'm very pleased because after listening to the deputy president's speech, just like all of you ladies and gentlemen, I feel relieved with his declaration of loyalty to me not as Mahathir but as party president."

Anwar had, in his speech earlier, reiterated his loyalty to the party president and told the assembly how closely they were working together.

Dr Mahathir said likewise when vice-president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said he supported Anwar in his winding-up speech, the latter had whispered to him that he (Anwar) was relieved.

To this Dr Mahathir said (as he told Anwar) there were no permanent friends or foes in politics.

The Prime Minister also said he took a serious view of the performance of his ministers and the day-to-day running of their ministries.

He said he regularly makes his rounds through the streets of Kuala

Lumpur to see for himself the situation on the ground and would jot down things that needed to be brought up during the weekly Cabinet meetings.

"Ministers would shiver each time I take out my notebook during the meetings. But that's what I want - for ministers to have a hands-on approach."

Later, at a Press conference at the end of the assembly, Dr Mahathir was asked whether any action would be taken against Zahid for not using official channels to express his grouses and dissatisfaction.

The Umno president said there will not be any action.

Asked whether he "could forgive" Zahid, Dr Mahathir said it was not a question of forgiving because in the party, everyone was aware of their role.

"That's why I made my clarification. We feel that it could be because he is new in the supreme council and does not fully understand the use of the council."

Asked whether all this had damaged the image of Umno Youth, he said as long as the movement was aware that there were other ways to express any dissatisfaction, its image would not be damaged.

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