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Project winners named to debunk allegations (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Two lists containing privatised projects and the companies which won them were released at the Umno general assembly today.

The lists also contained names of principal shareholders of the companies.

Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, confirming this, said the lists were released in response to allegations that the Government had practised cronyism and nepotism in awarding contracts.

He told a Press conference at the close of the second day of the party's annual assembly that the contents of the lists would prove that the Government was transparent and the projects were properly awarded.

"There have been accusations that privatisation has benefited only a few friends and cronies of the Prime Minister, maybe also the Deputy Prime Minister. So, we provide these lists to show who got the privatisation projects. There are literally hundreds of them," he said when asked what the party hoped to achieve by releasing the lists.

"There is no way we can be very intimate with them unless, of course, you define anybody who gets anything from the Government as a crony which means the Government cannot give anything to anybody."

Dr Mahathir, who yesterday launched a counter-attack against those who accused him of practising cronyism and nepotism, said the lists were released to Umno divisional heads.

On who actually released the data, the Prime Minister said they were obtained by his office from such agencies as the Economic Planning Unit with input from the State EPUs, the Finance Ministry, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry and the Entrepreneur Development Ministry.

"I requested that they compile the data because we have been accused of hiding things. We are not hiding anything. It is public information. If the people are to go through the records of the Registrar of Companies, they'll find these details. No problem."

Asked whether there was a possibility of some names being excluded, the Prime Minister said he would not know that, but the fact remained that he had asked for everything from the relevant agencies.

"They include my son's name ... if you like to know how many hundreds of times he had been given (projects)."

To another question, Dr Mahathir said the Government was not guilty of cronyism or nepotism "although this does not mean that we have to discriminate against anyone who is connected to the leaders".

He said if such a person had the capability, he had as much right as anybody else to vie for government contracts.

Dr Mahathir also said the names in the lists included those connected to senior Umno leaders.

"They are like anybody else. If they do business, they are entitled. But it's not given by Umno leaders. Our practice is if any of our relatives are involved, we are not allowed to participate in the decision-making."

The first list entitled Maklumat Asas Projek Penswastaaan (Basic Data of Privatised Projects) contains 171 projects involving some 350 companies and more than 400 principal shareholders.

The second list entitled Maklumat Asas Projek Penswastaaan - Kelulusan Prinsip (Basic Data of Privatised Projects - Approval in Principle)

contains 114 proposals involving 200 companies and 300 principal shareholders.

Asked if he thinks the delegates would be satisfied that the lists had been released, he said he would not know.

"We have been accused of giving everything to our families and friends," said the Prime Minister, adding that the public would now know who benefited from government policies.

They could, he said, make their own judgment whether these projects were awarded only to cronies, sons and daughters of government leaders.

He said the lists were needed because some Umno members did not bother to investigate if the accusations of cronyism and nepotism were true before making up their minds.

"We are giving them the opportunity to find out."

Dr Mahathir said when the Government successfully carried out privatisation programmes, accusations of cronyism and nepotism were made by foreign media and these were repeated by the Opposition parties.

And now, said the Prime Minister, Umno members were repeating them.

Also present at the Press conference were Deputy Umno president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and party secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik.

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