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PM: Prosper thy neighbour

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KUCHING, Sun. - The Chinese business community should help their Bumiputera counterparts rebuild businesses badly affected when the ringgit came under attack during the regional financial crisis, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said many Bumiputera businesses were destroyed, some of them completely, as they were "too new and some had grown too fast".

Opening the RM10 million Wisma Chinese Chambers here, Dr Mahathir said Chinese businessmen would gain by helping the Bumiputeras.

"Malays believe in the policy of prosper thy neighbour. We want them (neighbour) to become richer so that you can do business with them.

"If they are poor, then they are going to come to you with a begging bowl."

He said Bumiputera businessmen must understand that they must work very hard and practise prudent financial management and cannot blame the Chinese community if they fail.

Dr Mahathir said the Government recognised the role of the Chinese community in making the country one of the strongest economies in the developing world.

"The Chinese community realises the importance of reducing the disparity in economic wealth among the different communities and to give them a share in it. And because they (Bumiputeras) have a share, the feelings of jealousy and envy towards the Chinese community have almost disappeared."

Dr Mahathir said the country owed a lot to the Chinese community as much of its economic achievements were due to their dynamism, innovation and willingness to take risks.

"We are very glad indeed that during the time of the turmoil, nothing untoward happened, unlike in some other countries where, under the strain of economic problems, racial riots broke out, buildings were burnt, and the people killed or raped," he said.

Wisma Chinese Chambers, near Kuching Hilton, is an eight-storey building housing the Kuching Chinese General Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sarawak.

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