

# 'I didn't order takeover'

**Mahathir: I merely gave opinion when asked about Nanyang deal**

SUN 23 JUN 2001

**KUALA LUMPUR, Fri:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad stressed today that he did not direct the MCA to take over Nanyang Press Holdings Bhd.

He said he merely expressed his opinion when he was asked about it.

Speaking to reporters at the end of the second day of the Umno general assembly here, he repeatedly said he was asked by MCA whether it could buy the newspapers, and he said yes.

Asked what was the need for MCA to seek his consent, Mahathir said a lot of people, including the press, approached him to ask all kinds of questions.

"If they ask me, I answer, if they don't ask, I don't answer and since (MCA president Datuk Seri Dr) Ling (Liong Sik) asked me I said okay ... and if he didn't ask me, I wouldn't say okay," he added.

Asked if the takeover by MCA was intended to silence critics, he said: "Everything that I say is being interpreted by those who are against me in some way or other to tarnish my image."

Mahathir said the Chinese should not be treated differently from the Malays who have not objected to the political

ownership of a newspaper.

"I don't see why I should tell MCA no, you must not buy. How would I know how the Chinese community feels about a political party buying a Chinese newspaper, when the Malay community does not object to a Malay political party owning a newspaper.

"We can't treat the Chinese different from the Malays," he said, adding that he would say yes if the Gerakan or the PPP wanted to buy a newspaper.

Mahathir said even when Association of Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry Malaysia president Tan Sri Lim Guan Teik met him to seek his opinion, he had said yes.

He lamented that certain people are trying to link him with the Nanyang controversy.

"Now, is it wrong if the newspapers were to be more supportive of the government?"

"Asked again if he had issued a directive, Maha-

**PM: There was no directive**

SUN 23 JUN 2001

from FRONT PAGE

thir said: "What do you mean it is a directive, I don't understand the directive ... I keep on telling you they ask me, can they buy and my answer is, they can.

"A directive is when I call the MCA (and say) now you buy! (pointing a finger to illustrate)."

Asked if what he had said yesterday (in giving the green light to MCA on the takeover) might be used by proponents of the deal in Sunday's MCA extraordinary general meeting, he said: "Yesterday, you (reporters) asked me the question ... if you did not ask me, I

wouldn't answer ... Who asked me? ... the press."

Mahathir was asked by the media yesterday whether he had given Ling the green light to purchase Nanyang Press (publishers of Nanyang Siang Pau and China Press) to which he replied: "Ya. I gave him the green light to buy, but I also said he should sell off some of the shares and not hold the whole thing."

Asked on the reported presence of opposition party members in some roadshows organised by the group opposing the takeover, Mahathir said he was told about but "I don't know what is going on".