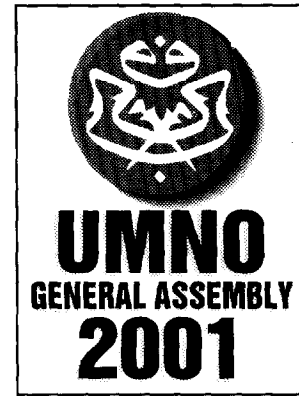


PM: I gave okay but not directive

STAR 23 JUN 2001



KUALA LUMPUR: No directives were issued to any parties to take over *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *China Press* although the green light was given to the MCA, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

The Prime Minister stressed that he agreed to the purchase because the MCA had asked him.

He said there was no law to prevent MCA from buying the newspapers.

"Is the opposition (parties) the only one which can buy a newspaper?"

"If the MCA asks me, 'can we buy a newspaper,' my answer will be yes. If Gerakan asks me, I would (have) said

yes, by all means do. If the PPP wants to buy, they can buy. How can I say no when people are saying that Umno has a newspaper?" he said.

He said even the DAP and PAS have got their own party newspapers.

He said he did not see any reason why he should tell MCA not to buy the dailies.

"How do I know that the Chinese community object to a political party buying over a Chinese newspaper when the Malay community does not object to a Malay political party owning a paper.

"We cannot treat the Chinese differently from the Malays," he said.

Asked whether MCA presi-

dent Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik had asked him whether it was all right for the party to take over the dailies, Dr Mahathir replied:

"Yes, he asked me, I said okay. If he didn't I would not (have) said okay.

"There are other people who came to see me asking whether they can buy the dailies and I said yes; like the ACCIM (Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry Malaysia)," he said.

Pressed whether the purchase was a directive, Dr Mahathir said:

"What do you mean if this is a directive? A directive is when I call them and say now you buy.

"Now, I am directing you to publish exactly what I said and not to try and twist it," he added.

On whether his statement that the MCA was given the green light would influence the party's EGM tomorrow, the Prime Minister said:

"Yesterday, you asked me the question, If you didn't ask, I would not (have answered). Who asked me (yesterday)? (It was) the press," he said.

On claims that members of Parti Keadilan Nasional and DAP had attended the roadshows held by MCA leaders opposing the deal, Dr Mahathir said he was told there were people who are not MCA members who were present