

'Don't drag me in'

SUN 24 JUN 2001

Dr M slams bid to link him to Nanyang issue as work of anti-govt groups

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today condemned attempts to involve him in the MCA takeover of Nanyang Press Holdings Bhd issue.

"In their efforts to tarnish the government's image, to show the government is anti-Chinese, they have now linked the issue of *Nanyang Siang Pau* with me, suggesting that I instructed them (MCA) to buy *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *China Press*," he said in his winding-up speech at the closing of the Umno general assembly today.

No cabinet reshuffle: Page 2

Making general references to PAS, DAP, Suqiu, Chinese school teachers and foreigners, he questioned the motive behind the opposition to the controversial deal and efforts to link him with it.

"Why? So that the Chinese, who are supposedly angry with MCA for buying over the newspapers, will be angry with me and the government.

"When they are angry with the government, (they will) support the DAP," he said.

Mahathir reiterated that he did not instruct the MCA to buy the two papers.

He said the attempt to link him and the government to the MCA deal is to shift Chinese

PM: Nanyang whipping up anti-govt sentiment

from PAGE ONE

SUN 24 JUN 2001

support to the opposition.

He said he gave his consent when asked by MCA if it could buy *Nanyang* and *China Press*, only to discover from those opposed to the deal that the Chinese community did not want the papers to be owned by a political party.

Calling this "very special", Mahathir pointed out that there are Malay newspapers owned by political parties, namely *Harakah* (PAS) and *Utusan Malaysia*, which Umno indirectly owns shares in.

"If we can buy a Malay newspaper, why can't MCA buy Chinese newspapers?"

"It appears as though the Chinese press have to be independent, this means the Malay newspapers are not free.

"Is this a special right? To me, if MCA wants to buy, buy-lah, there is nothing wrong. If MCA wants to sell, sell-lah, that is their right."

He questioned the contents in Chinese newspapers and asked if it is fair that while *Utusan* exercises

restraint when faced with race relations and sensitive issues, the Chinese papers are free to invoke hatred towards the Malays.

"They said the Chinese community disagrees (with the deal) - who are they? I don't see MCA people saying anything and MCA is a 100% Chinese party.

"What is wrong with the Chinese owning the papers?" he said, adding that he was "not campaigning for (Datuk Seri Dr Ling) Liong Sik".

Mahathir blamed *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *China Press* for whipping up anti-government sentiment among the Chinese, resulting in the Barisan Nasional's defeat in the Lunas by-election.

"They always emphasise the Opposition's views on the pretext of being free.

"I want to urge these newspapers, don't play up this issue. Don't drag me into this.

"The Chinese papers are free like other papers but if you play up racial issues ...," he said, leaving his sentence unfinished.

turn to PAGE 2