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■ Pictures by ABDULLAH SUBIR, RAJA FAISAL HISHAN and AHMAD ZABIDI TUSIN

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Dr M: DAP manipulating issue

KUALA LUMPUR: The opposition, particularly the DAP, was accused of manipulating the issue of the buyover of Nanyang Press Holdings Bhd by MCA to sow seeds of hatred among the Chinese community towards Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Government.

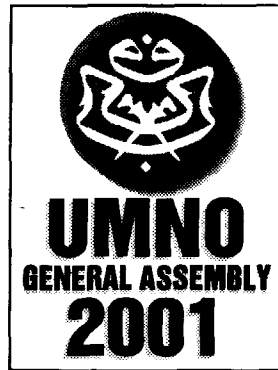
Dr Mahathir said this was being done by linking him to the buyover of Nanyang, which publishes two vernacular newspapers, *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *China Press*.

"MCA approached me to ask if it was all right for the party to buy *Nanyang* and *China Press* and I said yes.

"To me, there is no problem because that is its (MCA's) right. If it wants to sell the newspapers off, that is also its right.

"But now, in an effort to whip up resentment and hatred towards me and the Government among the Chinese community, the DAP is manipulating the issue by dragging me into it," he said in his winding-up speech on the last day of the Umno general assembly yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said he was not campaigning for MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, but was saddened when he was implicated in the controversy.



The DAP, he said, made use of the Chinese newspapers to champion the issue by saying that the buyover was against the wishes of the Chinese

community.

"They say that the Chinese community does not want their newspapers to be controlled by any political party. If a Malay newspaper like *Utusan* can be controlled by Umno, though not directly, why not the Chinese newspapers?"

"As it is, Chinese newspapers write whatever they want about the Malays because most Malays cannot read Chinese. Is it fair that we impose restrictions on *Utusan*, which the Chinese can read, from printing extreme reports on issues related to race, and allow the Chinese newspapers

to print reports which are designed to create hatred towards the Malays?" he asked.

Dr Mahathir also pointed out that he and Umno were fair to the Chinese community, citing support for Chinese schools which no other country had.

Reiterating that he had nothing to do with the move by MCA, Dr Mahathir issued a stern warning to Chinese vernacular newspapers to immediately stop linking him to the matter.

He said that during the Lunas by-election late last year, the role played by *Nanyang* and *China Press* on the vision school concept and the

Suqiu issue clearly showed that they upheld the opposition's agenda.

"Now, they claim that they want freedom from political interference. What freedom? I issue this warning to them — you are as free as other newspapers in this country, but if you continue to harp on racist issues ..., " he said without specifying what kind of action would be taken against those who disregarded his warning.

Later at a press conference at the end of the meeting, when asked to clarify his warning, Dr Mahathir said: "You can make your own assumption."