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Dr M: I gave MCA green light

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he gave the MCA the green light to acquire Nanyang Press Holdings but advised the party against holding the entire stake.

"Yes, I gave the green light for him (MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik) to buy but I also said he should sell off some shares and not hold the whole thing."

The Prime Minister said this when asked to confirm reports in several Chinese dailies today quoting Dr Ling as saying that he (Dr Mahathir) had given the green light for the MCA's investment arm, Huaren Holdings, to acquire the company which publishes Nanyang Siang Pau and China Press.

Dr Mahathir told a Press conference at the end of the first day of the Umno general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre that he could not see the reasons for the unhappiness of certain quarters about the takeover.

"This is an MCA matter. They want to take a paper, they have the right to do that as there are no laws in this country which say political parties are not allowed to take over a paper.

"But I did tell them that there might be certain reactions which might not be very favourable to them taking over ... but they have made quite clear their willingness to sell."

On the candidate to succeed former Finance Minister and Umno treasurer Tun Daim Zainuddin, the Prime Minister said he had not made any decision yet.

On whether there would be any changes in Umno-linked companies such as United Engineers Malaysia and Renong Bhd following Daim's departure, Dr Mahathir said:

"No, I don't see that they are linked to Umno, but the party has the right to buy shares like anybody else."

The Prime Minister was also asked by a foreign reporter whether he shared the concerns of his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who criticised Pas leaders for briefing Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer on Malaysian issues.

Dr Mahathir described Pas' action as "brown men running to the whites to resolve their (brown men) problems".

"We have discarded this practice already. We think we are at par with anyone, we can solve our problems without running to some white men, but these people still live in the past ... they are Pas."

Asked whether Australia could be said to be meddling in Malaysia's internal affairs, Dr Mahathir said the Australians could say anything they like as "I don't have any good opinion of them either".

He asked: "Why don't they attend to their Aborigines ... I am told in their jails, there are 17 Aborigines to every white Australian. Why is this happening?"

"In Malaysia, we also have the Orang Asli, but they are not in jail, they do not commit crimes."

Asked about the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's plans for wider coverage in the region, Dr Mahathir said it was sad the television station could not tell the truth.

"You are biased. Even when you asked me (today), you are not going to give a fair report. You are going to twist it. This is my disappointment with foreign TV stations which are actually doing a disservice to their

clients when they do not report the truth."

The Prime Minister said if false things were reported, businessmen who relied on such reports might not invest, a decision that would only cause them to lose out.

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