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`Move to acquire dailies not politically-motivated'

RAWANG, Mon. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said it was not his business to decide whether the MCA should acquire two Chinese dailies as proposed by the party's investment arm, Huaren Holdings Sdn Bhd.

"Nanyang is a newspaper ... anybody can take it over," he said. "I neither give my support nor my objection (to the proposed acquisition)."

The Prime Minister was asked to comment on objections raised by several quarters on the proposed acquisition of Nanyang Press - which publishes Nanyang Siang Pau and China Press - by the MCA investment arm.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir had launched the first made-in-Malaysia train built by Monorail Malaysia Technology Sdn Bhd.

Dr Mahathir refuted claims that the proposed move to acquire the two dailies was politically motivated.

In jest, he said: "Of course, all newspapers in Malaysia are politically motivated, including Harakah and Rocket, but nobody minds that.

"But if there is any doubt at all about the Government being involved or the Government party being involved, everybody becomes uptight ... why don't you ask Harakah."

Harakah is Pas's official newsletter while Rocket is the DAP's mouthpiece.

On reports that the two newspapers' senior management had been asked to step down, Dr Mahathir said he did not know as it was not his business to look after them.

An English daily had reported last week that at least nine top executives, including the dailies' editors-in-chief, had been advised to resign by this week.

On calls by certain groups that the Prime Minister block the deal, he said: "I don't see what business it is of mine to go and block deals."

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, who was at the launch, was asked whether the party would go ahead with the acquisition of the Chinese dailies due to the objections.

"If it is a commercially-good deal, then they (Huaren) will go ahead," he reiterated.

Asked on objections by several groups on the proposed acquisition, Dr Ling said there had been conflicting reports on the matter.

"Which one are you going to listen to," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on the abduction of 20 tourists and workers from an island resort in Palawan in southern Philippines yesterday.

"We have taken all precautions and we will make sure it does not happen in Malaysian territories," he added.

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