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PM: Don't drag me in

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He also reminded them not to fan racial sentiment. "Chinese newspapers are free just like any other newspapers. But if you continue to stir up racial issues...", he said, but did not elaborate.

The Prime Minister said that a deliberate attempt was made to tarnish the image of the Government by linking his name to the purchase of the Chinese dailies. He said it was to show that he had directed the purchase and that he was anti-Chinese.

He said the Chinese who did not like the newspapers to come under the control of a political party would be angry with him and oppose the Government.

"When this happens, the Chinese will support the DAP."

Dr Mahathir said it was strange that there was a feeling that Chinese newspapers should not be owned by a political party when Malay newspapers could; not only Harakah but also Utusan are indirectly owned by Umno.

"If we can buy Malay newspapers, then why not Chinese papers?" he asked.

Dr Mahathir said he did not understand why the Chinese strongly opposed the MCA's purchase of Nanyang and China Press but not The Star which was also indirectly owned by the party through its investment arm, Huaren Holdings Sdn Bhd.

He said the Chinese newspapers, especially Nanyang Siang Pau and the China Press had started to fan racial sentiment following Chinese rejection of the DAP in the 1999 general election which saw the political demise of its former secretary-general Lim Kit Siang and deputy chairman Karpal Singh.

He added that the DAP would do anything to win back Chinese support and create hatred among the Chinese towards the Barisan Nasional and the Prime Minister.

"Whatever I say will be linked to Chinese rights. I cannot say anything at all. If I say, it will be turned into an issue and highlighted in the Chinese newspapers.

"I want to be straight forward and truthful. Please report it truthfully and not manipulate it," he told the Press later when responding to points raised during the three-day General Assembly which ended today.

"When Suqiu demanded the abolition of Malay rights and Islam be placed on the same level as other religions in its 83-point demand, I appeared on radio and television and said that they were no better than the Communists when making such demands."

Dr Mahathir said they claimed that he considered all Chinese as communists and ignited the feelings of the Chinese to go against the Government.

"Chinese newspapers especially Nanyang and China Press highlighted the issue so that the Chinese would hate me and the BN with the hope that they would regain support for the DAP.

"Suqiu and the Chinese independent school teachers (Dong Jiao Zong) also harped on the issue to fan the feelings of hatred towards me and the BN.

"I am not anti-Chinese but I want justice also for the Malays and other Malaysians.

"It is not proper to allow one race to hurl allegations and slander the

Government while others must be controlled," he said.

The Prime Minister said this was not his stand alone but also that of the party.

"I am a straight forward person. I reprimanded both the Malays and the Chinese."

But, he said the Malays never said that Dr Mahathir was anti-Malay.

Instead, when he reprimanded Sugiu, which represented a small group of Chinese, he was made to look like he condemned the entire Chinese community by the Chinese dailies.

"This is not true as I have many Chinese friends and even my daughter-in-law is Chinese."

At a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir said there was an obvious attempt by certain quarters to make use of him over the Nanyang controversy, aimed at creating an impression that he hated the Chinese.

He said when the DAP lost in the last general election it showed that the Chinese had rejected the party, which since then had tried its best to win back Chinese support.

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