

# 'Companies going down the drain'

THE economy is in bad shape and this could hurt Barisan Nasional's chances at the next polls. said Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The unemployment rate was high, the retail business was not good and contracts were not easy to come by. causing small contractors to suffer, he said.

"Nothing has been done, really, to improve the economy although we read of very good figures," Dr Mahathir said yesterday. He then cast doubt on the very figures he used to rely on during his 22 years of leadership.

"It sounds a bit strange to me

get 55.8 per cent of the popular vote. That was also the year when the DAP snared 24 parliamentary seats.

Voters also voted with their feet in 1999 when there was deep resentment among the Malays over the Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim issue.

Even before Sunday's meeting, the Abdullah administration has been ramping up the economy. It kept a tight rein on spending in the first two years because of a promise by the previous administration to narrow the budget deficit.

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when I see companies going down the drain." he said.

Speaking to reporters at his home in Seri Kembangan, Dr Mahathir said the Chinese business community was "very unhappy" with the business climate.

"Some of them have said, and I told this to Pak Lah (Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi), that they will not vote for BN in the next election."

Dr Mahathir is well qualified to advise Abdullah on the vagaries of electoral support. He was the prime minister during the gut-wrenching recession years in the mid-1980s. During the 1986 election, the BN only managed to

Asked whether he was trying to tell Abdullah how to run the country. Dr Mahathir said: "Why not? If you are doing it the wrong way, you are destroying the economy of the country. The country is not doing well and if you want to believe, that the country is doing well and pooh-pooh what people are saying on the ground, that is up to you lah."

He said governments which were sensitive would take criticisms into consideration.

"It may take the form of resignation or it may take the other forms like stopping all these wrong things, things that people criticise about."