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PM: We will manage race relations wisely

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SINGAPORE: In a wide-ranging dialogue session with some of the world's top business leaders, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi pledged that Malaysia would remain harmonious and continue to manage race relations wisely.

He also said he "did not know the meaning" of cronyism and that the government would not bail out troubled private enterprises.

Abdullah was addressing about 400 business leaders in the Forbes Global CEO conference and sought to allay concerns at the forefront of the minds of potential investors.

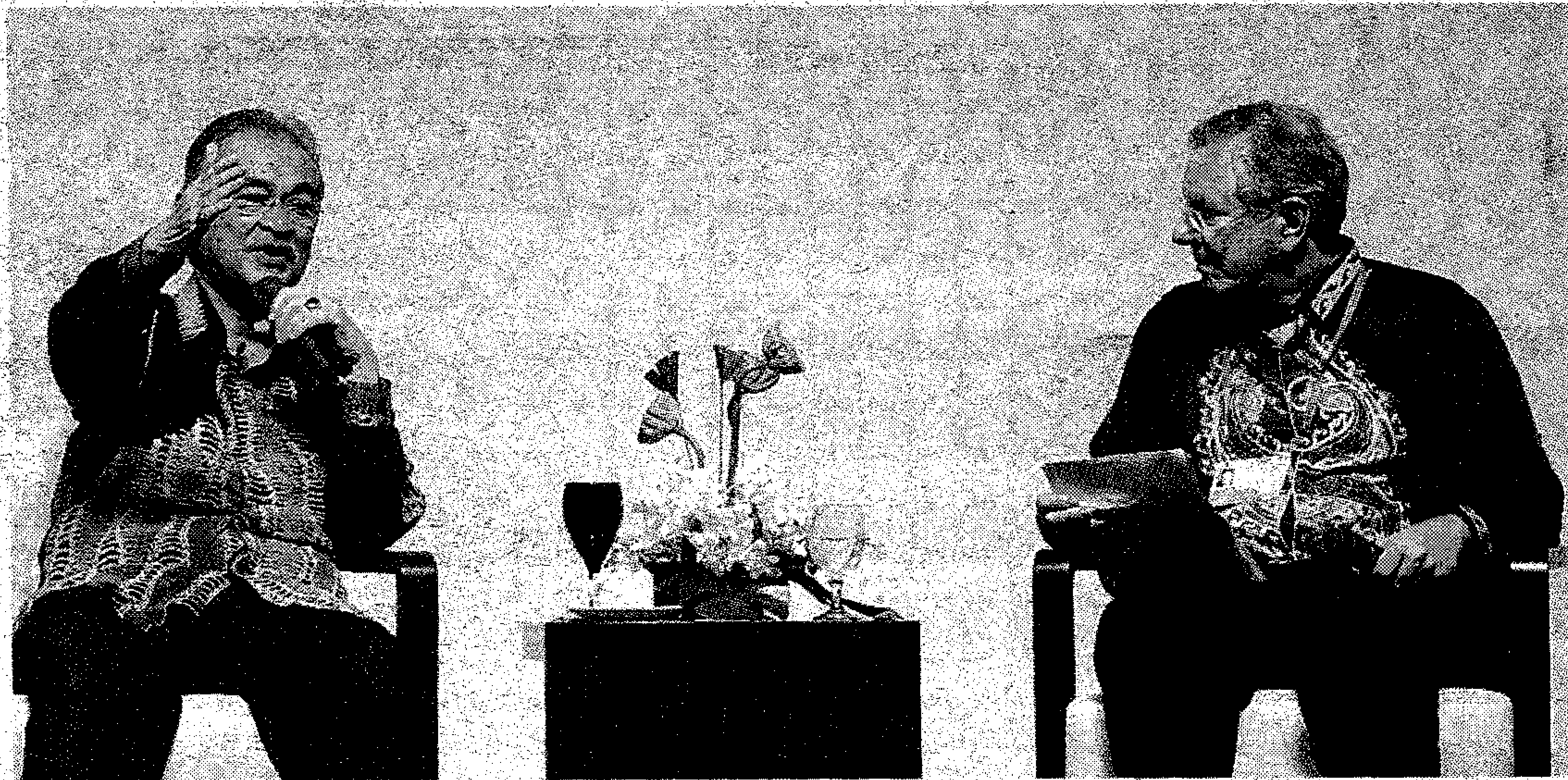
Among some of the concerns were the state of ethnic relations in the country, additional incentives that the government would provide to attract investors and how the nation plans to compete with China and India for foreign direct investment.

These were expressed in a dialogue with *Forbes* magazine president and chief executive officer Steve Forbes.

While explaining to Forbes about the government's encouragement of private finance initiatives to fuel the development of mega projects, Abdullah warned those who failed not to beg the government for help.

"We will allow you to build and develop your projects but please do not come and ask us to bail you out when it fails.

"I would rather use the money for other projects that would serve the people," Abdullah told a



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (left) with Forbes magazine president and chief executive officer Steve Forbes during their dialogue in Singapore yesterday.

packed gathering at Sentosa Cove here last night.

To a question from Forbes that non-Malays were concerned of late that they did not have a future in the country due to the government's preferential treatment of Malays, Abdullah said the country would not be where it was if not for its wise handling of race relations.

Abdullah, the Barisan Nasional chairman, explained that the coalition's formula of power-sharing meant that the country's policies were agreed to collectively by all leaders of Malaysia's varied ethnic communities.

"The cabinet, which includes leaders from the communities, does not make decisions unilater-

ally. If, for instance, the leader of the Indian community does not agree with a decision, we do not make the decision but go back and talk about it until a consensus is reached."

When Forbes asked about worries of cronyism in the award of contracts and tenders, Abdullah swiftly responded by saying: "I do not know the meaning of the word. Everyone will get a chance."

In his speech before the dialogue, Abdullah reiterated a primary thrust of his administration, which was to address the income and economic disparities between the urbanised centres of Penang and Kuala Lumpur and the rural heartlands in the north and east of the peninsula and in

Sabah and Sarawak.

This would be done through the building of growth corridors such as the recently launched Northern Corridor Economic Region, the Iskandar Development Region and the upcoming Eastern Development Corridor.

Abdullah said Sarawak and Sabah would also get their own growth corridors in the near future.

"These regions have unique endowments that are underemployed, either due to a lack of infrastructure or tailored incentives.

"We hope to make the Northern Corridor the hub for food industries and electronics and the Eastern Corridor a centre for petrochemicals and tourism."