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NEP must continue, says Dr M

Mahathir: Malays need to avoid becoming most backward race in the country

KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the New Economic Policy must continue even though many Malays had misused the opportunities given to them, such as selling off their business licences and contracts.

The former prime minister said that if the Malays had made the best use of those opportunities, they would have attained not only 30% of the nation's wealth but much more than that.

He said the NEP had to be continued because the Malays had yet to attain the quota, but they should continue to strive to avoid becoming the most backward race in the country.

"The Government will safeguard our position, but there will come a day when it will not be able to defend national policies," he added.

Dr Mahathir was delivering a keynote address at a symposium on *The Malay Dilemma: Perspective and Conclusion*, organised by the Persatuan Alumni Pemimpin Mahasiswa Aspirasi Malaysia at the Putra World Trade Centre here yesterday.

To a question from the floor on why the NEP should be continued when he had admitted that there were abuses, Dr Mahathir said: "If you don't give, then nobody will have it.

"But if you give, they may misuse

it. So, we need to be more selective.

"It is not the policy that went wrong but the implementation."

To a question whether the country's leadership had been too greedy and whether the Chinese and Indians had been working hard while the Malays became spoilt, he said the Government could not not spoil the Malays because the opportunities were their rights.

However, added Dr Mahathir, the Malays should not rely too much on the Government.

To a question by DAP national publicity chief Tony Pua on the Government's RM6bil allocation to buy six offshore patrol vessels for the navy, Dr Mahathir said it would

not be a problem for the Government to explain.

"The cost of things have gone up," said Dr Mahathir, who had warned the Government in his address not to get into an arms race with neighbouring countries.

At a press conference after his address, Dr Mahathir was asked about reports that DAP adviser Lim Kit Siang had accused him of re-writing history by putting the blame on police for the arrest of 106 people under the Internal Security Act in 1987.

Responding to the allegation, Dr Mahathir was adamant that he met opposition leaders before *Ops Lalang* and had assured them that they

would not be arrested.

"I have no reason to make the claim unless it (the meeting) had happened.

"I met them and assured them, but, of course, I don't expect opposition leaders to be grateful to acknowledge anything from the Government, particularly myself," Dr Mahathir said.

Lim had commented on the book *Doctor M: Operation Malaysia - Conversations with Mahathir Mohamad*, which revealed the former prime minister had said the 1987 crackdown was a police decision.

He also denied that Dr Mahathir had met him and other opposition members.