

**Dr M: Chinese gained from NEP**  
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**By Shannon Teoh**

PUTRAJAYA, Feb 29 — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad defended again his 22-year administration's implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP), stating that Chinese businessmen also benefitted when Malays were given contracts.

The former prime minister, who led the country from 1981 to 2003, told reporters here that "when Malays were given contracts, they have to buy from Chinese suppliers."

"There were no Malay suppliers. So when they want to buy cement, tiles or steel, they have to buy from the Chinese," he said.

Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, Dr Mahathir's old rival for the Umno leadership, last week criticised the controversial policy for creating an incubated class of Malay capitalists but failing to address poverty and raise the level of Malay participation in the economy.

Dr Mahathir responded the same day saying different races were represented at all levels of the economic ladder.

He pointed out that "other races also became millionaires and billionaires," and cited Berjaya's recently-retired chairman Tan Sri Vincent Tan, Hong Kong-based Robert Kuok and communications magnate T. Ananda Krishnan as examples.

In recent weeks, Dr Mahathir's policies have been the subject of scrutiny, after the Najib administration decided to settle out-of-court the debt owed by former Malaysia Airline System Bhd (MAS) chief Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli.

The settlement sum was undisclosed, prompting intense public criticism and attacks from the opposition over the right of taxpayers to know how much public funds had been recovered.

Tajudin, 65, had served as the airline's executive chairman from 1994 to 2001 and was a poster boy of former finance minister Tun Daim Zainuddin's now-discredited policy of nurturing a class of Malay corporate captains on government largesse during the Mahathir administration.

Dr Mahathir also said today Chinese support for his administration, especially in 1999 when the Malay vote swung away from Barisan Nasional, was proof that the community benefitted from the NEP.