

MAHATHIR: GREED IS MAIN CAUSE OF CORRUPTION

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By Zulkifli Talib

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad said today that the main reason for corruption was not low wages but greed.

The Prime Minister said if low wages were the main reason, those who were highly paid would not be corrupt, adding: "We all know there are people who earn a lot and demand a lot in bribes."

He said that he knew of a country which had increased civil servants' salaries three-fold to check rampant corruption.

The result was that the civil servants demanded three times more (in bribes) than before, he added when opening an anti-corruption seminar for senior government officials at the National Institute of Public Administration (Intan).

Dr Mahathir also advised against living beyond one's means. "If we do not spend more than we can afford we will not be tempted to take bribes," he said.

He said that gambling could also open people to the temptation of accepting bribes. He said good values and religious guidance could help check corruption.

Dr Mahathir said corrupt practices were difficult to check because they were mostly done on the quiet. "It would help if society made clear that it frowns on corruption as despicable."

He said corruption in Malaysia was not so rampant that people dared to commit a corrupt act openly. "However, we still have to check corrupt practices done on the quiet," he added.

With the country steadily heading towards NIC (Newly Industrialised

Country) status, it could not be denied that opportunities for corruption would increase with big projects coming in, he said.

"It is imperative that senior government officers are aware of this as foreign investments will be affected if efforts to stop corruption are not intensified," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that curbing corruption was not the responsibility of the Government alone, but the private sector, too.

People in the private sector should be on the look-out for corruption because they too were in a position to delay or hasten work on a project, he said.

He said that community leaders should also play their part.

Dr Mahathir said that one problem faced by the Anti-Corruption Agency was the delay in trying offenders.

He said that if the case was brought before the Disciplinary Board, the punishment would be light.

"At the same time, it takes too long for a case to be tried. By then the witnesses and the officers concerned would have forgotten about the facts of the case," he added.

Earlier, ACA director-general Haji Zulkifli Mahmood said that 120 government servants was arrested by the agency from January to August this year.

Of the 120, 14 were in Group A, 16 in Group B, 49 in Group C and 41 in Group D.

He also said that two politicians and 72 other people were also arrested.

Haji Zulkifli said that 1,320 civil servants and politicians had been arrested since 1984 while 485 had been referred to the Disciplinary Board since 1984.