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Mahathir - Court

GOVT TO STUDY ANTI-GRAFT LAWS

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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 19 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the government would study various aspects of corruption prevention laws including identifying possible weaknesses in the present system.

The government viewed corruption as a serious matter, the Prime Minister said when asked to elaborate on his comment yesterday regarding the Kota Kinabalu High Court's sentence in the corruption case involving Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan.

Dr Mahathir said the government would have to consider whether it should charge leaders of opposition parties for corruption in future.

"Usually, few corruption cases can be prosecuted in court because of insufficient evidence," he told reporters after attending a luncheon here given by newly appointed Youth and Sports Minister Haji Ghani Othman to his Cabinet colleagues.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister said the High Court's fine of RM1,800 imposed on Pairin, who was found guilty of abusing his position as Chief Minister to award a shophouse project to a company belonging to his relatives, might contain a message for the federal government. -- more

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Section 2(1) of the Emergency (Essential Powers) Ordinance 1970, under which Pairin was charged, provides a maximum jail sentence of 14 years or a fine of RM20,000 or both.

With the sentence, Pairin is cleared to continue as Chief Minister and to contest in the state elections scheduled for Feb 18 and 19.

A fine of RM2,000 or imprisonment for a year would have disqualified him from holding public office.

Dr Mahathir said the government would try to understand whatever "message" was conveyed in the sentence because it viewed corruption as a major offence.

"We want to know where we went wrong. Is the mistake in the formulation of the law or is it in its prosecution. Or is it that we should not bring a case involving a leader of an opposition party to court," he said. -- more

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He said: "In contrast, when Umno was ruled to have illegal members in the kampungs, the entire party was declared illegal. If that was viewed seriously but this (corruption case) is not, then we want to know what it should be."

Dr Mahathir also said the study would examine whether the present legislations relating to corruption were too drastic or it might not be necessary to have such laws.

Asked whether the government would appeal the sentence in the Supreme Court, he said: "We will not appeal. Why should we appeal? It's not going to get us anywhere, anyway. People will think we are trying to persecute him."

-- Bernama