

Review of graft laws and legal system

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — The Government will study various aspects of laws preventing corruption and identify possible weaknesses in the present system.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Government viewed corruption as a serious matter although it accepted the Monday decision of the Kota Kinabalu High Court's sentence in the corruption case involving Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Josphe Pairin Kitingan.

"The Government will have to consider whether it should charge leaders of the opposition parties for corruption in future," the Prime Minister told reporters after attending a lunch hosted by newly-appointed Youth and Sports Minister Ghani Othman which followed the weekly Cabinet meeting.

Dr Mahathir said few corruption cases could be prosecuted in court because of insufficient evidence.

The Prime Minister had said yesterday that 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 worth RM1.48 million to a company belonging to his relatives, might contain a "message" for the Federal Government.

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

With the RM1,800 fine, Pairin is eligible to be a State Assemblyman and MP since the Federal and State Constitutions provide that anyone fined RM2,000 or imprisoned a year automatically loses his eligibility to hold both elected positions.

Dr Mahathir said: "We want to know where we went wrong. Is the mistake in the formulation of the law or is it in the prosecution? Or perhaps we should not bring a case involving a leader of an opposition party to court?"

He added that the case against Pairin was the second one after a similar case involving Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang.

(Lim Kit Siang was convicted by the High Court on Nov 7, 1978 on charges pertaining to the disclosure of secret information regarding, among others, the technical specifications of four fast strike craft bought by the Royal Malaysian Navy in 1976 and the identity of the shortlisted tender applicants.

(He was fined RM15,000 —

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No intention to appeal against decision on Pairin

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RM5,000 for the first charge, RM1,000 on the second charge, RM3,000 for the third, fourth and fifth charges.

(Following his appeal, the Federal Court reduced the fines to RM6,500 — RM1,500

for the first charge, RM1,000 for the second charge, RM1,000 for the third charge and RM1,500 for the fourth and fifth charges.

(The effect of the reductions to below RM2,000 on each charge was that Lim was not disqualified as an

MP or State Assemblyman).

Dr Mahathir said: "When an Umno member in a kampung made a mistake in its registration, the whole party was declared null and void. Such an incident had been viewed seriously but in this case (Pairin), it had not

been given the same consideration. We want to figure out what that means."

Asked whether an appeal would be made against the High Court decision, the Prime Minister said the Government did not intend to do so.