

22 APR 1996

Mahathir-corruption

DR M: NO GOVT FREE OF CORRUPTION, MALAYSIA NOT SPARED

By: Salbiah Said

MALTA, April 22 (Bernama) -- No government in this world is free of corrupt practices and allegations of corruption, and Malaysia for one is also not spared, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"There is a well-known saying that power corrupts, all governments are corrupt, but there are levels of corruption. Some governments are so corrupt that nothing can be done," he said at the second biennial conference of the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM) here.

He was responding to comments from a delegate on his keynote address in which he criticised developed nations that perceive Commonwealth governments as superfluous, being purportedly a collection of corrupt officials.

In his address, Dr Mahathir had said that there was also a notion that Commonwealth governments comprised politicians who acted as impediments to the freedom of the people.

Delegates from 51 member countries are attending the four-day conference which was opened by Malta Prime Minister Dr Edward Fenech-Adami today.

Corruption, Dr Mahathir said, could take many ways. People make accusations against a government, and some are difficult to prove. In many cases there are political motives, mainly from the opposition.

"And strangely, the moment one government or person is accused, the government concerned or that particular person continues to be persecuted," he said.

The only way to curb corruption, he said, was fear of god. The people have a relative fear of god. Not always, but to some extent, it does help. In Malaysia, he said, the government tried to use democracy to the utmost.

"If you continue to hound them, the new government in power will have this same problem and there is no solution. Government policies will not be carried out and the country will not be able to achieve growth and competition," he said.

To points raised by another delegate on government and private sector partnership, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia Incorporated, a concept based on Japan's success story, was one way of preventing corruption.

"Under Malaysia Incorporated, the private sector secures contracts from the government in the open and +not in the dark+," he added.

"If it works in Japan, then it should also work in Malaysia, with 30 per cent of what companies make, would go to the government coffers through the corporate tax."

In his address, Dr Mahathir said "it pays to cooperate with the private sector," help them succeed and make profits. Government collects taxes from the people in order to finance the administration, to pay the salaries of civil servants.

The Malaysian government, he said, was encouraging civil servants to work hard so that they can be rewarded in terms of bonus.

Governments, he added, should be concerned with policies and directions to facilitate private sector initiatives.

To date, 100 government entities have been privatised, a case in point is Telekom Malaysia Bhd. Before the utility heavyweight was privatised, it used to pay RM200 million annually to sustain its employees, but last year, it turned in a profit of RM2,000 million.

"Of course, we did not sell off everything. Seventy percent of the Telekom stake is still in the government's hands.

"We let the private sector do their business, but there is still a need for a government. In Malaysia, we want to have a government which functions like governments," he said.

A Malaysian delegate, who declined to be named, said later that Malaysia's ability to continually sustain high economic growth, contain inflation below four percent and achieve full employment indicated that the country had been able to prevent corruption.

He said only when a country creates a conducive environment for investments and encourage competition could corruption be eliminated.

Dr Fenech-Adami, who also responded to the points raised on corruption from the delegates, said that before he took over the helm as premier nine years ago, there was a lot of allegations of corruption.

He said the government under his leadership would take the bull by the horns and assured the people that the government would be accountable for its actions.

"The ground was fertile for corruption before I took over office from the previous governments," he said.

The securing import licence was one area which was prone to corruption, but thanks to trade liberalisation, there was hardly any corruption of import licences now, he said.

The Maltese government, he said, was embarking on major economic changes such as building new hospitals and infrastructure, resulting in high contracts awarded to the private sector.

"Every single accusation on malpractices in awarding of government tenders would be dealt with and debated in Parliament. We have not silenced the opposition," he said.

He said the Maltese people also have access to government files as there was nothing to hide, unlike previously when allegations on corruption were rife.

"While we are not immune to allegations of corruption, we must open up," he said.

Last Friday, the government introduced an Interpretation Act which paved the way for more visibility, transparency. It has to explain the decision process to the people. "We have to be serious with public perception." -- BERNAMA

SS YBY