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LEAD Mahathir-Betrayers

PM BRANDS CHEATING CONTRACTORS AS "BETRAYERS"

KUALA LUMPUR, April 26 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today branded Bumiputera contractors who cheated the government as "betrayers" and warned that stern action would be taken against them.

The Prime Minister said stern action needed to be taken against such contractors because they were "betrayers of the Bumiputeras" and were the people who frustrated the achievement of the New Economic Policy (NEP).

"We were reproached for not helping the Bumiputeras (but when) we helped, there were people who did such things.

"I am very disappointed if it is true such things have happened," he said when asked by reporters at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang on his return this morning from official visits to Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia and a working visit to Malta as well as a private visit to Italy since April 14.

He was commenting on reports of contractors falsifying information to obtain government contracts. After receiving downpayment of up to RM12 million, they did not carry out the projects and instead disappeared.

The Prime Minister said the government had resorted to various means to help Bumiputera contractors, including granting them a 15 per cent advance on the contracts awarded so that they could commence work. Instead, they cheated the government.

"People like these are the ones who betray the Bumiputeras and all the government's efforts," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he would seek a detailed report on the alleged rip-off from the Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed.

He said investigation would be carried out to ensure the contractors involved got what they deserved including having to pay back the downpayment which they obtained through illegal means.

"If we find that there is evidence, we will make sure they cough out all that money they took illegally," he said.

Asked whether government officers and politicians were involved, Dr Mahathir said: "Whoever, all those involved, will be investigated and if there is wrongdoing, action must be taken."

However, the Prime Minister said, he did not want to make accusation against anyone before he was proven guilty.

Asked why the alleged rip-off was not detected earlier since the matter was reported to have occurred for the past three to four years, he said it was difficult for the government to determine whether the Bumiputeras it wanted to help were honest or dishonest.

"Can you tell whether a person is a crook or otherwise just by looking at his face?

"After it happened, then we know and now we will take action," he said.

-- BERNAMA

AH ABG