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Graft-panel

ANTI-GRAFT FIGHT NEEDS STRONG POLITICAL WILL, SAYS ZAM

KUALA LUMPUR, July 15 (Bernama) -- Strong political will is needed to fight graft in the country more so now because of the notion that bribery is acceptable, veteran journalist Datuk Zainuddin Maidin said tonight.

Bribery has now become a form of transaction, acceptable as a cultural norm in Malaysian society, claimed Zainuddin, who is better known as Zam.

"A glaring example is when there are people who unwittingly commit graft prompting Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) to call for an end to sponsored overseas trips," he said.

Zainuddin, a former Utusan Melayu Group editor, said this as a panel member discussing the graft menace in national development on Radio Television Malaysia's (RTM) talk show "Wawancara" over RTM 1.

The other panel members were Kumpulan Guthrie chief executive Datuk Khalid Ibrahim and Anti Corruption Agency (ACA) head of planning and coordination, Abu Kassim Mohamed.

Zainuddin said Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim himself had acknowledged that corruption prevailed among politicians.

The unhealthy activity was attributed to the country's rapid economic development which purportedly allowed for "taking or giving on a larger scale", said Zainuddin.

History, he said, had shown that rampant corruption had even brought down Chinese dynasties.

Abu Kassim said the ACA would scrutinise through government departmental systems and procedures to look out for room for corrupt practices to take place.

"This is to enable action to overcome them. The ACA acts proactively for long-term preventive measures such as those taken against the Road Transport Department," he said.

"In the past we have to wait all day to get things done ..and because of the waiting, some were willing to pay to get things done fast. Now that computerisation has speeded up the process, people no longer need to give bribes," he said.

Abu Kassim said the main causes of corruption are power, greed and the opportunities to commit it.

Khalid said speaking from experience as a businessman, bribery was looked upon as part of a business transaction.

"This means businessmen have to bribe their way through to do business. This to them is part of the costs. This is regarded as a normal matter and this is scary," he said.

Khalid said theoretically, the way to fight graft would be "to look for the capital owner since only those with money could give bribes."

He proposed a special panel, comprising legal, accounting and computer experts as well as representatives of corporations, be set up to study ways to overcome graft.

The proposed panel could advise and update the ACA and the government on processes of corruption, Khalid added. -- BERNAMA

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