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Barisan goes all out against corruption (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Barisan Nasional today gave a thumping endorsement of the Government's war against corruption and declared that the scourge should be fought without fear or favour.

The 14-party ruling coalition unanimously agreed that those who accepted gratification in return for favours should be prosecuted, irrespective of their status and the associations they belong to.

In announcing this, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also Barisan Nasional chairman, spoke of expensive gifts and souvenirs received by politicians and high-ranking civil servants at ceremonies.

He said the gifts and souvenirs received by BN politicians and government servants should be sent to the Finance Ministry to be valued.

"These souvenirs are meant only as tokens, but sometimes they cost thousands (of ringgit).

"As such, we will decide on the souvenirs that can be accepted by the recipients and those that they should send to the Finance Ministry," he told reporters after chairing the BN meeting at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Dr Mahathir said if it was an expensive gift, the recipient would be given a choice of whether to buy it from the Government or to allow the ministry to keep it.

He said as souvenirs came in many forms, it was difficult to ascertain at this juncture which were the gifts that could be kept by the recipient and those which had to be handed over to the Government.

"However, if they are treated to a meal, they can accept it. They can also accept fruits, unless, of course, they are made of gold."

Dr Mahathir said corrupt leaders and officials should realise that they faced the risk of being investigated and if there was evidence, they would be produced before the courts under the new Anti-Corruption Act.

Under the proposed Act, passed by the Dewan Rakyat and Dewan Negara last week, those guilty of corrupt practices would face mandatory imprisonment of up to 20 years and a fine of not less than five times the value of the gratification offered or received.

Under the previous Prevention of Corruption Act 1961, the most severe penalty was a maximum fine of RM10,000 or imprisonment for a maximum seven years, or both.

Among those present at the meeting were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who is Umno deputy president, Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, who is BN secretary-general, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, who is MCA president, Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, who is MIC president, Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, who is Gerakan president, Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Leo Moggie, who is Parti Bangsa Dayak Sarawak president, and People's Progressive Party (baru) president Datuk M. Kayveas.

Dr Mahathir said there would be no discrimination and those involved in corrupt practices would be prosecuted irrespective of their positions in the BN.

He said BN had formulated a code of ethics for those who were involved in the State and Federal administration.

He said it was not practical for all souvenirs to be sent to the ministry.

"We will decide what can be kept and what should be sent to the

ministry."

At present, all souvenirs presented to the Prime Minister are either displayed at the Galeria Perdana in Langkawi or the Registry of the Prime Minister's Department.

(END)