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Clear signal on corruption (HL)

Tengku Sariffuddin

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said today the Government has sent out a clear signal on its stand on corruption, adding that it was time to act against corrupt politicians and administrators.

"I think the message is loud and clear," he told reporters after delivering a keynote address at the International Conference on Muhammad Iqbal and the Asian Renaissance at Pan Pacific Glenmarie Resort.

Anwar was asked whether he had informed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad of the corruption case involving State Assemblyman for Durian Tunggal Datuk Sahar Arpan who was charged in the Malacca High Court yesterday on three counts of corruption.

Sahar, formerly State Science, Technology and Industrial Development Committee chairman, is alleged to have used his position as a State Exco member to approve applications for two plots of land between 1994 and 1995.

Anwar said Dr Mahathir was aware of the case as they had discussed the matter before the Prime Minister left for his working holiday on May 18.

"I am keeping him informed. Our general view is that we will not tolerate or condone corruption at any level among administrators and politicians."

He said the Anti-Corruption Agency would be strengthened and given additional power, manpower and other resources to deal with allegations of corruption and abuse of power.

Asked whether Sahar's case was the start of a crackdown on corruption at high level, Anwar said it had started a long time ago.

On whether the ACA would make public the outcome of its investigations into seven other State executive councillors (one each from Johor, Pahang, Kedah, Sabah and Selangor and two from Malacca), Anwar said they would be charged in court if the ACA was satisfied there was evidence to prosecute them.

He said the ACA would not make public their names if investigations showed the allegations were unfounded.

The fight against corruption is a moral and legal issue, he said, adding that the Government would not be dictated by the media or certain sections of society in this matter.

Anwar said the Government would ensure injustice was not committed against those allegedly involved in corrupt practices.

He said it was improper to assume that a public figure or those vested with authority were corrupt merely because of a complaint to the ACA.

It would be contrary to the principle of justice if that happened, he said.

"The fact that an allegation of corruption is made and the ACA sought a clarification from a person does not mean that he is involved in any wrongdoing."

Anwar said sometimes the allegations were made by unsuccessful bidders of contracts.

"Sometimes it (allegation) is true, sometimes it is not. We cannot assume because one person is involved, others are involved.

"We do not want, in our zealotry to check corruption, to cause injustice. I know society wants action to be taken and we do not want to compromise but we need to have evidence to act."

On the directive to executive councillors in some States to declare their assests to the ACA, Anwar said it was to update their financial records, especially of those who had just been appointed.

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