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Alatas-Corruption

CORRUPTION CAN LEAD TO CIVIL WAR, WARNS ANTI-GRAFT CRUSADER

By: Azman Ujang

KUALA LUMPUR, June 8 (Bernama) -- Dr Syed Hussein Alatas has waged a virtually one-man battle against corruption in Malaysia for over 40 years and can be counted as its earliest crusader.

As early as in the 1950s, he wrote a series of newspaper articles to create awareness in society about corruption and this was followed by several books on the scourge, the first one in 1968 under the title "The Sociology of Corruption".

Dr Alatas would be the first to admit that all the warnings he wrote in his articles and books about corruption have largely fallen on deaf ears, as the stories about people living well beyond their official income have become an open secret in a country jolted by its spectacular economic success especially in the past decade.

But it remains a subject close to the heart of this former politician and one time vice-chancellor of the University of Malaya. Recently, he received a pleasant surprise when Transparency International, a Berlin-based organisation committed to creating awareness against corruption worldwide, appointed him to its Governing Board.

The appointment could not have been more opportune, coming as it did in the wake of the Malaysian government current crackdown on corruption in high places, backed up by the political will of both Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who have sent out a clear signal on the government's stand against corruption among politicians and administrators.

" I am very delighted that at long last, the problem of corruption in Malaysia is recognised," he told Bernama in an interview here, obviously referring to stepped-up action by the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) in the past weeks against politicians, and others reportedly in the pipeline.

" One of the most serious effects of corruption if left to grow malignantly for a country like Malaysia is civil war," warned the 69-year old professor in no uncertain terms.

Asked if the civil wars and anarchy which have become a common occurrence in many African countries is the result of corruption, Dr Syed Hussein said: "Absolutely. This is exactly what I mean."

A civil war spawned by corruption may not take place overnight but it may take decades before it becomes apparent.

He said in Malaysia, the effects of corruption had also become all too apparent in such occurrences like the massive traffic jams, floods, housing collapse, pot-holes, bad construction, industrial accidents and road accidents.

"I could go on and on.....", he added.

The immediate debilitating effect of corruption is lowering the quality of life, standards of living, confusion of moral values and the emergence of false leadership in society.

In his view, the problem of corruption is multifarious and it has a deep influence through the entire sectors of social life.

"It is either the most stupid or the most evil leader who does not recognise the problem of corruption," he said again taking Africa as an example.

He said to build up the momentum generated by the current crackdown, the first thing to do is to mobilise and galvanise public opinion against corruption.

Dr Syed Hussein proposed that Umno organise a conference on corruption, which could be followed by other component parties of the Barisan Nasional as well as by mobilising Members of Parliament and State Assemblymen for similar purposes.

Such conferences would be a tremendous boost for public morale against corruption and it would show the government's seriousness to combat this "most important evil" in human society.

Dr Syed Hussein hailed the proposed law expected to be tabled in Parliament later this year to empower the ACA to forfeit the property of suspects who cannot account for their wealth as well as stiffer fines against those found guilty of corrupt practices.

"This is a very good move because the burden of proof will now rest with them (the suspects)," he said.

Dr Syed Hussein agreed that the ACA needed to be beefed up but said increased manpower should mean more people to do the investigation work per se because the agency was being given too many "ad-hoc cases" to be investigated.

The ACA should also be independent in selecting cases for investigations and its annual report should provide details of its investigations but without disclosing the identities of people under probe, instead of just giving statistics like at present.

The ACA being accountable to Parliament should furnish these details, such as by explaining why certain cases were dropped because statistical reports were inadequate.

Dr Syed Hussein also called for equally tough measures against corruption in the private sector as most of those now under probe by the agency appeared to be civil servants and public officials.

" Now that we are serious about the problem, to seriously tackle or to curb corruption, you can't go into a battle without being serious about the weapons. You can't go into a battle without a strong political will to fight," he said.--BERNAMA

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