

17/04/1997

Customs practically graft free, says outgoing chief

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - A top Customs official today said he believed that his department was "practically graft-free" despite being among frontline government agencies dealing with the public.

Although he did not deny that there were some corrupt staff, but the number was small, outgoing director-general Datuk Mohd Nor Abdul Hamid said.

He said the collection of import taxes over the years also increased, a further testimony that the department did not have a problem with corrupt officers.

"Our collection of import duties had risen from RM11.97 billion in 1991 to RM17.67 billion in 1995, proving that the department was almost graft-free.

"This is further strengthened by the fact that very few officers are investigated by the Anti-Corruption Agency," said Mohd Nor.

He told this to reporters after handing over his duties to his former deputy Ahmad Padzli Mohyiddin at his office in Jalan Duta.

Last year, less than 10 Customs officers were investigated by the ACA.

Of this number, three were detained and charged with corruption, he said.

He supported Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's plea to Government departments to be graft-free.

"Even before Dr Mahathir made his plea, the department had established several programmes to ensure that graft was not an issue.

"We had set up anti-corruption committees to ensure that this did not happen. These committees exist at the Federal and State levels," he added.

On whether the department would follow the lead of the Home Ministry which had said it would have its own network of "spies" in the police and Immigration Department, Mohd Nor said this was not necessary.

He said senior officers have the power to take action against any of their subordinates whom they suspect of being on the take.

"The department follows the principles set down by the Customs Co-operation Council of the World Customs Organisation in Arusha, Tanzania on July 7, 1993.

"The declaration is concerning integrity in Customs," said Mohd Nor.

The declaration states that one of the top priorities of any Government should be to ensure that Customs is free from corruption.

Meanwhile, Mohd Nor said Customs officials had seized about RM2.82 million worth of smuggled items in January and February this year.

The import duties on these items, which include compact discs, liquor, cars, cigarettes and electrical goods, totalled about RM4.08 million.

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