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Dr M: I'm always present spiritually at all sessions

Fadzil Ghazali

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had the Dewan Negara in stitches yesterday when he told the senators that he is always present at every sessions.

"I may not be here physically but spiritually, I am always here. So, you all should not think that your behaviour is not made known to me when I am not around physically," he said.

Dr Mahathir was replying to Senator Yim Chee Chong during the oral answer session. Yim, in forwarding a supplementary question on corruption, had requested for a more frequent presence of Dr Mahathir at the Senate seating.

The day's session saw more-than-the-usual number of supplementary questions from the senators, all eager to witness the Prime Minister's wits in clarifying issues.

One senator even asked Dr Mahathir a question on the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), which was originally posted to the Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Ministry.

Dr Mahathir said the Government's strategy in promoting MSC is by giving incentives as well as assistance to those who are investing in information technology and multimedia industries.

* THE Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMTGT) has succeeded in realising 47 joint-venture projects worth some RM11 billion in sectors including telecommunications, tourism, trade and financial.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said 14 of these projects have been implemented while the rest are still in various implementation stages.

"These projects will have great influence on the development of the areas involved," he said in reply to a question by Senator Charern Intachat.

Dr Mahathir said the aim of the IMTGT is to enable the private sectors of the three countries to mutually reap the benefits and together cooperate in the development of the area.

He added that all the three countries are fully committed in ensuring the success and development of the triangle and will continue to work towards encouraging more investments from the private sector in the growth triangle.

Dr Mahathir said the Government only played the role of a facilitator to generate participation of the private sector in various joint-venture projects.

To a supplementary question by Senator Datuk Abdul Aziz Abdul Rahman, he said, the Government has no plans to establish a similar growth area involving the East Coast states, Vietnam and Cambodia.

* THE Government has to exercise extreme care in amending the Anti-Corruption Act 1961 to ensure that victimisation does not occur.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the implication of amending the law needs to be studied in details because when it comes to corruption it tends to have an impact even on those who are later found not guilty.

"Baseless allegations resulting in further investigations will generate emotional stress to those who are being investigated. Thus, victimisation can occur," he said in reply to a supplementary question by Senator Kamalia Ibrahim.

Dr Mahathir said the Government is aware that there could not be a law which is 100 per cent effective in achieving its objectives.

"For example, we have imposed a death penalty for dadah trafficking but the activities still continue. There are those who still break the law," he added.

To the original question, Dr Mahathir said the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) has arrested 301 individuals under the Act from 1990 till to date.

He added that the penalty against those who are guilty is the same for offerers and receivers of bribes, that is a fine not more than RM10,000 or jail sentence of at least five years or both.

Dr Mahathir said the aim of having the Act is to create a clean society that is free from corruption and this is in line with the Islamic teachings.

He added that at present, the ACA's procedures provide a facility for the public to inform the agency in checking the crime. These include a toll-free line; putting officers at its office until 10pm; and having a homepage so that people could provide tips via the Internet.

To a supplementary question by Senator Datuk Ibrahim Ali, Dr Mahathir said so far, the declaration of assets from cabinet ministers, deputy ministers, parliamentary secretaries and state executive councillors is going smoothly.

"All those who are required to declare their assets have been doing so, and I am satisfied with their declarations," he added.

Dr Mahathir said actions will be taken against those who under-declared their assets. He added that there is no need to make this as a statutory declaration.

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