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Group-Corruption

DR MAHATHIR'S STRONG LEADERSHIP PRAISED BY INTERNATIONAL GROUP

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, July 31 (Bernama)--Transparency International (TI), an international group that has vowed to fight corruption in businesses around the world, has praised Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for his strong leadership of the country.

"Malaysia has accomplished admirable things under the strong leadership of Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad," Director of TI in Germany, Dr Michael Wiehan (pronounced: Vee-hen) said in an interview.

Praising Malaysia for its fight against corruption, he said the level of awareness in Malaysia had increased and "I am deeply impressed by the determination of the Malaysian government to fight corruption."

The Berlin-based group, whose operation is funded mainly by western companies and government agencies, including the US Agency for International Development (USAID), unveiled its annual corruption index on Thursday.

It came up with a list of 52 countries, with the least corrupt nation occupying the number one slot. Malaysia however slipped to 32nd position compared to its 26th position in last year's index.

According to the index, a score of 10 meant that country enjoyed totally corrupt-free status.

Malaysia had a score of 5.32 compared to 5.01 last year.

None of the countries surveyed achieved a perfect score of 10 or a totally corrupt-free status, but Denmark at No 1 position in the list, came close with a score of 9.94, followed by Finland, and Sweden while Nigeria was at the bottom of the list with a score of 1.76.

Meanwhile, Singapore which led the Asean countries occupied the 9th position in the list compared to its 7th position last year. Thailand ranks at No 39, followed by the Philippines (40), Vietnam (43) and Indonesia (No. 46).

"I wouldn't worry about the score," said Dr. Wiehan, what's important was Malaysia had now become more aware of the corruption issue.

The 11-page report noted that the Malaysian Government initially reacted with anger to the publication of the index and Dr Mahathir called it another example of Western "cultural imperialism."

However, a serious effort was made by Malaysia to understand the methodology of the index and a delegation from the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) was sent to Berlin to study the mechanics and methodology of the index.

A national TI chapter was formed in Malaysia under the leadership of Tunku Abdul Aziz.

Scott Avelina, Manager of Business Ethics Services at KPMG Peat Marwick, a professional services firm here, said businessmen that he had talked to, took the index very seriously although they debated the reliability of its data.

The index is based on seven international surveys of business people and it reflects their perceptions of corruption in 52 countries. Founded in 1993, TI today has more than 70 national chapters.

Avelina said there was "no way to measure corruption in an objective way because corruption is clandestine. All we have to go on is perception."

He said, Malaysia had a long way to go and it needed to improve its position on the index as part of its strategic economic outlook.

Chairman of TI International, Dr. Peter Eigen, said in a statement,

The media's focus is on the developing countries of the world when reporting on the Corruption Perception Index because corruption is perceived to be greatest there, but I urge the public to recognise that a large share of the corruption is also the product of multinational corporations, headquartered in leading industrial countries, using bribery and kick-backs to buy contracts in the developing world and the countries in transition."

"Transparency International is not saying in this index that one country is more corrupt than another. We are reporting how business people around the globe perceive levels of corruption in different countries. We must also bear in mind that many of these business people are a part of the problem," he said.

European companies, in particular, are allowed to engage in transnational bribery and get tax deductions from their governments for payment of "commissions" to foreign governments in return for lucrative contracts, said Dr. Wiehan, who added that the bribe could range from US\$5 (five) to \$20 million.

However, he added, OECD countries, including EU members, have agreed to outlaw transnational bribery and tax deductibility by the end of next year.

Asked if TI regarded the American political system as corrupt whereby politicians and political parties were allowed to accept campaign funds from interest groups and corporations in return for future favours, Dr. Wiehan tersely replied, "We at TI deal with business corruption. I have no view on that question."-- BERNAMA

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