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Mahathir-Corruption

GOVERNMENT TO DETERMINE SOUVENIRS POLITICIANS CAN KEEP

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 9 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the government will determine the types of souvenirs politicians can keep for themselves and those to be handed over to the government.

He said that souvenirs could be misconstrued as a form of gratification especially if they were expensive items.

"We will determine which ones are mementos, souvenirs that can be kept, which to be sent to the Treasury to be valued if they wish to acquire them or to be handed over to the Treasury for custody or the gifts are to be surrendered to the government," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is the BN chairman, was speaking to reporters after chairing the Barisan Nasional Supreme Council meeting at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

He earlier stated that all leaders of the BN component parties agreed to wage an all out war against corruption among BN members.

Dr Mahathir said that the government had so far not determined the types of souvenirs that politicians could keep for themselves as the matter, in certain circumstances, is complicated.

"It is a little difficult where food is concerned...the nasi lemak having to be sent to the ministry. Therefore at times we allow them to consume the food...it is not forbidden for them. The same goes for fruits...they are not forbidden for them, but if the fruits are crafted from gold, then it is a little different," he said.

The Prime Minister said that the presentation of mementos and souvenirs is a common practice in Malaysia, some merely as a token while sometimes the items given as gifts are expensive.

Asked whether this ruling covers politicians and civil servants, he said: "We are talking now only about politicians but I think the same applies to civil servants."

Meanwhile, BN secretary-general Datuk Mohamed Rahmat said that the ruling is in line with the Prevention of Corruption Act 1997 passed by the Dewan Rakyat recently, requiring souvenirs worth more than RM2,000 to be declared to the Treasury.

He said that the Anti Corruption Agency (ACA) would conduct briefings on the new ruling for state governments. The federal government is well-versed on the matter, he said.

"There is no need to for those below RM2,000 (in value), but those above RM2,000 have to be declared to the Treasury...the various types have to be explained by the ACA," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there may be some complications in determining the types of souvenirs that should be handed over as it is just not practical for some to be handed over to the government.

"If he is given some apples, he can eat them but if he receives some other items, he has to declare. But as I've said, it is a little complicated as there are many kinds of gifts and it is just not practical for some of them to be handed over to the Treasury as we know that we receive gifts everyday.

"For instance, I went to an exhibition recently and each booth presented me with something. To them this is a promotion and I am just a tool for them to promote their goods.

"I don't use them...what would I do with so many telephones, so I sent

them back. But sometimes when we sign something, the pen used is given to you, engraved with your name and other things. Such things can be considered...which ones we want to keep and which you don't," he said.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said that at present, even without a ruling, some gifts received by the Prime Minister are handed over to the Galeria Perdana (in Langkawi) and others to the registry in the Prime Minister's Department.

The ruling is to ensure that it is applicable nationwide, he added.

Dr Mahathir said that gifts given to him in the form of cars have been handed over to the government.

Gifts given by BN component parties to the BN chairman are kept at the BN office, he said.

The Prime Minister also said that the BN had drafted a code of ethics for politicians involved in federal and state administrations and would be applicable to all.

He said that BN leaders and members suspected of being involved in corruption would be prosecuted.

They should realise that they faced the risk of being investigated and if there were clear proof against them, they would be produced in court under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

"We want a clean BN government. And in this respect we will not discriminate," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that action would be taken against those involved irrespective of their positions in the BN.

They would even face action regardless of their association with any parties, he added. -- BERNAMA

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