

02 SEP 1997

Mahathir-Corruption

MINISTERS TO STAY OUT OF BUSINESS DECISION-MAKING INVOLVING THEIR CHILDREN

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 2 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight ministers will be removed from any decision-making process which involves their children's business activities.

"If there is any suggestion of some patronage on the part of their parents, we will certainly remove the parents from the decision-making process," he said.

However, the prime minister stressed that one cannot assume that simply because they are members of the ministers' family, what they do must be because of their (the ministers') connections.

"Some people think that it is not effective enough (removing them from the decision-making process) but we cannot expect that the children of the people in the government must be rendered poor and unable to do business.

Dr Mahathir said this during a live interview over Cable News Network's (CNN) Q&A programme.

The one-hour programme with Riz Khan as moderator was aired live over Astro, Mega TV and RTM at 9pm.

Dr Mahathir was responding to a question on how he viewed families or children of senior ministers being involved in business, which in the eyes of the public, seemed to be corruption.

The prime minister said that when the minister concerned was not allowed to participate in the decision-making process, others would have to take over.

He said it was "quite unfair and illogical" to deny ministers' family members or children from engaging in business activities.

"If they do things on their own so long as they do not involve the government, I think they have a right to do business or work with the government or whatever," he said.

Asked if it (corruption) could be due to the Asian culture where families are closely involved in many things, Dr Mahathir said it was "not an Asian culture but a world-wide thing".

"That is a biased view about Asians... I see a lot of corruption among British ministers, French ministers, Italian ministers and of course American politicians," he said.

The prime minister added: "Some of them are involved, even (U.S.) presidents have had their sons involved in business. I met one of them at least and they were doing business at a time when their fathers were presidents of the United States."

"So, I can't suspect that they are corrupt unless of course they say 'well if you want to talk to my father, you must come to me and pay me a certain amount', then I would assume they are corrupted," he said.

During the interview, Dr Mahathir was also asked about the media restrictions, if any, in Malaysia.

He said that since Malaysia was a multiracial country, there was a need for the press to be responsible, failing which there would be destabilisation and "we will all have to pay a price".

On Malaysia's support for Myanmar's entry into Asean, Dr Mahathir said Kuala Lumpur had the support from the other members of the regional grouping.

Dr Mahathir also took to task a caller who wanted to know if Malaysia had benefited from what he termed as laws which segregate the people, contrary to the one in Australia which calls for equal rights to

individuals.

"It (the law) has benefited the country. As you can see, we have grown very fast, there is political stability and the people celebrate the national day together. Therefore, they are not as concerned.

"But, you are being academic. You do not consider what is happening here. You consider that your principles are more important than what actually happens on the ground.

"This is the problem with a lot of very theoretical people. Because we believe in freedom, then freedom must be shoved down everybody's throat even if they choke in the process," he said.

On the two-day visit by chief executive of the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong Tung Chee Hwa to Malaysia beginning tomorrow, Dr Mahathir said Kuala Lumpur wanted to know more about Hong Kong now that it has become part of China.

He said Malaysia and Hong Kong would like to continue doing business as in the past. -- BERNAMA

ES JK