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MP suggests assets be declared to a panel

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PETALING JAYA, Sun. - People holding positions that are likely to expose them to corruption should be required to declare their assets to a "panel" as a preventive measure, Backbenchers Club president Ruhanie Ahmad said today.

He added the panel could be established within a legal framework and be given powers to initiate action against anyone found to have made a false declaration.

He was speaking to reporters after participating as a panelist at a Round Table On Corruption: An Assembly of Voices convened by Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang at the Tropicana Golf and Country Club. The theme was "Towards Zero Tolerance for Corruption".

Lim chaired the session. Panelists included former Auditor-General Tan Sri Ahmad Nordin, the first Anti-Corruption Agency director-general and former judge Tan Sri Harun Hashim, former Universiti Malaya vice-chancellor Dr Syed Hussein Alatas and veteran journalist Tan Sri Samad Ismail.

Others were Just World Trust director Dr Chandra Muzaffar, Convenor of Transparency International (Malaysia) Tunku Abdul Aziz Tunku Ibrahim, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Independence of Judges and Lawyers Datuk Param Kumaraswamy, economist Dr K.S Jomo, National Human Rights (Hakam) secretary-general Gurmit Singh and Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations Prof Hamdan Adnan.

"The fight against corruption should be supported by all political party members, the public, NGOs and opposition leaders. Without such support all other efforts would fail," said Ruhanie.

He said a mass mobilisation of interest and awareness against corruption among all Malaysians was needed.

Earlier, in the panel discussions, he said the Government, through Umno, should extend the declaration of assets to cover all senior civil servants and leaders of political parties.

Lim, in his opening speech, called for a formation of a national coalition for national integrity to create a new culture of public integrity with zero tolerance for corruption.

"Such a coalition is vital if an all-out war against corruption is to succeed," he said.

Samad touched on the need to nurture a firm attitude of intolerance towards corruption.

"Corruption has taken new forms...The situation has become so critical that the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad found it necessary to initiate and lead the fight against money politics," he said.

Ahmad, voiced support for Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's view on "back to basics" in combating social ills, including corruption, stressing the need to strengthen family kinship.

Harun said although he was not sure of the level of corruption in the country there was a lot of "market talk" among the public.

He said the ill should be tackled in stages starting right from the Cabinet to the lower levels.

However, he pointed out the country had limited resources to combat corruption.

Harun said the ACA currently had a staff of only about 2,000 in relation to the country's population of 21 million people.

In contrast, he said, the Hong Kong's Independent Commission against Corruption has a staff of about 12,000 for a population of only six million.

Syed Hussein said Ministers when taking their oath of office should also be required to say that they would not be corrupt.

"If the Minister is a Muslim he should go to a mosque and proclaim that he would not be corrupt while in office," he said.

He said Ministers of other religions could do the same at their respective place of worship.

Chandra said amendments to the Prevention of Corruption Act should include confiscating of ill-gotten gains of those involved in corruption.

Gurmit said there was a need to reach the masses in the fight against corruption.

He also touched on the need to cut down red tape in Government departments as a measure to combat corruption.

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