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Opposition urged to support anti-graft Bill

IPOH, Tues. - Umno Youth chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said the Opposition should support the Anti-Corruption Bill 1997 because the Government was serious in combating the problem at all levels of society.

"They want transparency in the Government and this Bill will fulfill their wish and as such the Opposition should give their wholehearted support," he said.

Zahid added the Bill was one of the most severe laws formulated to check abuse of power.

"We (Umno Youth) fully supports the Bill because the Government is sincere in combating graft at all levels of society," he told reporters after attending the launch of the Bagan Datoh centenary celebrations at a hotel here last night.

Zahid, who is also Bagan Datoh MP, said this in response to questions from reporters on the Bill which was tabled for second reading by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

He said the Government had studied several overseas anti-graft laws like those from Hong Kong and Sri Lanka before it drafted the Bill.

Zahid said the Bill gave more powers to the Anti-Corruption Agency to carry out investigations without much hitches.

"There is also a sort of separation of powers where the ACA investigates while prosecution will be decided by the Attorney-General's Chambers," he said.

He said the Bill also sought to take action against those who made false reports as the Government wanted to protect the innocent parties from being implicated.

"We also welcome the high fines imposed on those convicted as it will serve as a deterrent to others," he said.

Zahid added a provision to seize the property of those who could not explain how they acquired wealth would lead to greater accountability.

In another development, he said the movement supported any move to have one fatwa for Muslims all over the country.

"The Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) had pointed out the source of a fatwa is the Quran and the Hadith and there cannot be different interpretations," he said.

On this basis, Zahid said he welcomed a suggestion by New Straits Times columnist Tan Sri Harun Hashim who proposed the setting up of a National Fatwa Council.

He said Article 3 of the Federal Constitution could be invoked and the Conference of Rulers should establish a council comprising all State muftis to issue fatwa from time to time for approval by the rulers.

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