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PM: Tackle corruption quickly, decisively (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Umno celebrated its 51st anniversary today with another reminder by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that its members should work hard to help check social problems, especially corruption.

The Prime Minister said although corruption had not reached a critical stage, the Government was determined to tackle it before the situation got worse.

He said the Government feared that the people could one day accept corruption as part and parcel of the local culture. Therefore, it had to be tackled quickly and decisively.

Dr Mahathir said this in his speech at the end of a forum held at the Putra World Trade Centre to mark the party's 51st anniversary today. Earlier, Dr Mahathir opened the Umno gallery at the PWTC lobby.

He said Malaysia was fortunate because corruption had not reached a level which made it difficult to overcome.

He said corruption should not be allowed to reach a level where it would no longer be regarded as an "under the table" activity but accepted as a practice.

Dr Mahathir said the Government had issued repeated warnings and reminders to the people to help check corrupt practices among leaders and government officials.

The Prime Minister's points reinforced his statements made yesterday on the same subject. After chairing the Umno supreme council meeting, Dr Mahathir had said that the party would not tolerate or protect those involved in corruption, regardless of their positions in the party or Government.

He also said the party would be firm in dealing with those involved in corrupt practices, irrespective of their status, even if it involved friends and whether they were high or low ranking officials.

Dr Mahathir said a failure to tackle corruption and other social ills such as bohsia and loafing at the early stage would result in their becoming major problems.

"As a doctor, I should know ... if a leg is bad, we have to amputate it slightly at the top, not at the bottom," he said.

Dr Mahathir used a common phrase - bisa diatur (can be arranged) - to highlight the corruption issue. The phrase is commonly used when there is a problem to be overcome and this is usually accompanied by certain financial compensation.

Also present at the forum were Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, deputy Umno president and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, Youth chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Wanita chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman and supreme council members.

Dr Mahathir also reminded members on the need to maintain the unity and spirit which had enabled the party's founding members to oppose the Malayan Union and help end colonialism.

He said they defeated the British who had just emerged victorious in World War II. He said Umno pioneered the struggle to secure independence without using arms but through their unity and spirit.

He said members should reflect on the party's history as it served as a guide for them to forge ahead and face the many challenges.

"We defeated them (British) through our spirit and unity ... we have to

protect Umno forever as our struggle is not finished," he said.

Dr Mahathir said while the spirit and struggle of Umno remained, they were modified to keep abreast of development.

He said the focus of Umno's struggle was now to fulfil the goal of independence which was to make Malaysia a developed nation in line with Vision 2020.

This was to ensure Malaysians, especially the Malays and Bumiputeras, were on par with the other races, he said.

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysia's international standing would be enhanced if the country achieved its goal of being a developed nation by 2020 and became a "giant country".

"When we are a giant, we do not have to shout as other countries will listen and learn from us to acquire the knowledge and expertise we have."

Already, Dr Mahathir said, some African heads of government whom he met during his recent visit to the region said terima kasih at the end of their speeches.

He said, however, Malaysians would have to acquire the knowledge and skills if they wanted to be on par with the developed world and attain international recognition.

Malays and Bumiputera had the ability to acquire the knowledge and skills provided they were given the opportunity and willing to work hard, he said.

The forum, Pengkisahan Sejarah Umno - Kejayaan dan Cabaran (The History of Umno's Struggles - Success and Challenges), was organised by Umno Youth.

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