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Mahathir - graft

PERPETRATING GRAFT IS SOCIAL OPPRESSION, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 8 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today reminded leaders and administrators that perpetrating graft against the have-nots is a form of social oppression.

Left unchecked, corruption may build up public resentment against the establishment and subsequently undermine national stability, he said.

He was launching a campaign to consolidate integrity in the government's management system at the headquarters of the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) here.

"If the administration or its members collude with greedy traders or entrepreneurs, the consequence will be escalating operating and development costs," he said.

It is the people who would have to bear these costs whereas most utilities meant for them did not reach the public or become too expensive and unaffordable, Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir said integrity and trustworthiness are part of good ethics in any management system.

An untrustworthy administration would be unmanageable and would render government administration unimplementable, he said.

In fact it could only lead to anarchy and erosion of governance, the prime minister said.

"If officers entrusted with revenue collection are untrustworthy, obviously the treasury will be depleted," he said.

Consequently the government would not be able to allocate sufficiently for national operating and development costs, he said.

The prime minister said even in the mercantile sector, untrustworthy staff tasked with looking after the employers' property and funds would eventually cause the business to go bankrupt and put the workers themselves out of job.

Dr Mahathir said domestic and international trade would suffer and economic growth retarded if a country's traders and workers were untrustworthy.

He said workers upholding virtues such as sincerity, honesty, discipline and dedication would not need constant supervision.

"As such this will obviously enhance efficiency and reduce costs," he said.

Dr Mahathir cited the fall of ancient majestic empires as examples of the consequences of over-indulgence in hedonistic pursuits which ignored ethical and religious values.

"The decline of the Roman and Ottoman empires as well as the Malacca Sultanate is proof of this fact. Heads of state, leaders and members of the administration were too preoccupied with hedonism without giving a thought as to where the funds came from to support such good life.

"It was in such an environment that the national wealth was being embezzled by those from the lowest level to the uppermost leadership," he said.

Dr Mahathir said in society corruption occurred in two stages, the first discreetly and the second, openly,

Characteristically when graft has only reached the first stage, society still looked down upon corruption as despicable and unacceptable, he said.

It is at this stage that corrupt practices could still be contained albeit with difficulty to substantiate for lack of proof, the prime

minister said.

But when corruption evolved into the second stage where it would take place openly and involve parties from the highest official to the lowest personnel, graft could no longer be checked and rid of, he said.

Dr Mahathir said corruption in Malaysia was still at the first stage.

"It is still abnormal for us to hand out bribes. We have yet to have terms like `bisa diatur' (can be arranged). Therefore we still can act to curb corruption," he said.

Dr Mahathir said a terribly corrupt society could not possibly progress and become rich since it would incur high living costs because anything that had to be done would inevitably include the "cost of bribery" as well.

He said corrupt individuals would also not be able to acquire much extra since they would have to bear the cost of bribery when dealing with other officers.

"On the other hand, in a corruption-free society, bribery don't raise living costs. One need not pay more than what is being charged for to get things done," he said.

The prime minister said to curb graft every public member and officer that one has to deal with would have to play a role.

He said the public should be forthcoming in making complaints against corrupt practices while officers overseeing service should attend to each and every complaint and act accordingly.

"There has to be a time-frame to settle a matter and when service is frequently delayed, firm action should be taken," he said.

At a press conference later, Dr Mahathir acknowledged that corruption in the country was on the increase.

"I consider the level (of corruption) is serious. Ideally we would like to have no corruption at all. If there is an increase we can't take the matter lightly, we must take it on as a menace that we must get rid of," he said.

To date the ACA has received 10,000 corruption-related complaints and more than 600 were being investigated upon, the prime minister said after an ACA briefing on the national graft situation.

The ACA had also received less poison-pen letters related to corruption last year, he said.

The new anti-corruption laws now enforced give the agency added powers to act especially against those who cannot account for the source of their wealth, he said.

At today's function earlier Dr Mahathir also simultaneously formalised the establishment of integrity committees in government administration management at federal, state and district levels.

He handed over copies of the Anti-Corruption Act 1997 and the Prime Minister's Order 1/ 1998 to eight VIPs representing the government in carrying out graft-prevention programmes -- BERNAMA

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