

03 AUG 2001

Mahathir-Administration

EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATION SAVED NATION, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 3 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the country was saved from being bogged down by problems resulting from the economic slowdown because of an administration and staff who are efficient and hold true to the promise they made when they joined the government service.

The prime minister said that up to now Malaysia was safe compared with several neighbouring countries which were still grappling with the problems caused by the economic downturn and now new problems had emerged due to the slowdown in the United States economy.

"We saved ourselves because we have an administrative system and administrative staff who are efficient and hold true to the promises they made while in government service," he said at the presentation of the Finance Ministry's excellent service awards here.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, said that in some countries the salaries were very low and because of that there were dishonest acts like corruption.

He said that such a situation continued until corruption was regarded as the norm in dealings with the government.

This, he said, could be due to the low wages and the workers had to supplement their incomes with contributions from government clients.

"But I was told that when the salaries are increased three-fold, the officers would ask for three times more because they now have more pay.

"Clearly, saying no to corruption does not depend on our pay but on our culture and ideologies and noble values," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that although it could not be denied that corruption existed in Malaysia, it was not rampant to the extent that it had become the norm in society.

He said: "Corruption has two levels...first, there's under-the counter corruption which means that it is not accepted as a practice in society.

"Whoever is involved hides it...they only receive (the bribes) under the counter.

"After a while, when it becomes a practice accepted by society the corruption will rise above the table...meaning that it is no longer concealed.

"So the bribes given are a normal matter...in fact there are specific rates for specific work," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that in Malaysia corruption only occurred under the counter and "we hope that it will not only remain under the counter but will disappear completely".

"Then we will get cleaner service because only with clean service can we administer better and get the returns from the country's development," he added.

He said that when the country was developed, the government's revenue would increase and part of that revenue would be used to pay wages and other allowances.

The prime minister also criticised those who wanted the government to increase the salaries of civil servants although it did not have the funds to do so.

He said the government must manage its finances prudently because otherwise the country would have a high deficit account and its currency value would fall although it was now controlled by the government.

He urged all civil servants to understand this and continue to provide efficient service so that they would get commensurate returns for their efforts.

At the ceremony Dr Mahathir presented awards to 75 ministry staff, 30 of whom received diagonal salary increments and 45, vertical increments.

-- BERNAMA

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