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Level of corruption too low to affect businesses: Dr M

Hamisah Hamid

POCKETS of graft exist in Malaysia but the level is low and does not affect business activities in the country, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"We can't say that there is no corruption at all. For one thing, it is not easy to detect. But the level of corruption surely is not high, or else we will not be able to do business because the cost of doing it will be very high," he said.

Speaking at a news conference after opening a seminar on "Integrity In Business - The Way Forward" in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, Dr Mahathir said corruption in the country is not rampant as businesses are blooming and companies are showing good profit margins.

He said the Malaysian society sees corruption as negative, and thus bribery in the country is only done "under the table".

There are countries, he said, where corruption is practised in the open but this is not the case with Malaysia.

"The Anti Corruption Agency (ACA) is aware of the 'under the table' practice and has the means to nose out bribery.

"I would like to warn the people not to get involved with corruption as the ACA can detect them ... we know it happens but it is not an accepted practice," he said.

Earlier in his speech, the Prime Minister said rampant corruption would lead to the rise in the overall cost of living.

He said the prices of goods and services will inevitably increase when traders or suppliers bribe the government or bank officials when they apply for loans or contracts, or when the suppliers themselves receive bribes when they supply the goods.

When corruption cannot be contained, he said, those who have received bribes will also have to bribe others in all transactions.

"The negative effects of corruption will be felt by the society, including those who received the bribes.

"As such, they actually do not get any benefit or self-gain as their earnings are used to bribe the others," he said.

Dr Mahathir said societies and countries which have accepted corruption as a normal practice have all been left behind and will never be successful or progressive.

He said the democratic system which provides the right to the people to vote can also induce corrupt practices.

This, he said, will result in the election of candidates who might be incompetent to run the country.

"The voters will elect candidates who make offers or promises during election campaigns.

"As such, the government will comprise people who resort to corrupt practices and not those who are efficient in running a state or a country," he said.

The Prime Minister said the people's attitude and their strong religious conviction are more effective in curbing corruption than laws and actions of enforcement agencies.

Strict law enforcement, he said, will not necessarily have the desired effect.

"Religious conviction will lead to a dignified way of life. No religion advocates corruption," he said.

He also said that if society views corruption as a dreadful crime and a shameful offence, there will be fewer cases of corruption.

The one-day seminar was jointly organised by the ACA and the ministries of International Trade and Industry, and Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs.

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