

Dr M: My legacy will speak for me

Irate ex-PM defends his anti-corruption record

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KUALA LUMPUR: The most important thing in the fight against corruption is to ensure that a culture of viewing the practice as normal and acceptable does not develop, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"For me, this is a question of inculcating noble values, not about catching people," the former prime minister said.

He said this at a press conference at his residence here in response to a column in the *Sunday Star* by *The Star's* deputy group chief editor II Datuk Wong Chun Wai.

In the article entitled *Pile on pressure against the corrupt*, Wong said: "It is good that Dr Mahathir had come out strongly against corruption but personally I wished that he could have done more during his 20 over years in office."

Wong added that despite his strong leadership, authority and grip on Umno, Dr Mahathir had let slip the opportunity to introduce reforms, including effective enforcement of laws against corruption.

While remaining grateful to Dr Mahathir for the economic boom, Wong said one source of unhappiness was the introduction of the negotiated tender that lacked accountability and openness, which was like not having a tender at all.

Expressing his disappointment over Wong's column, Dr Mahathir said it seemed to suggest that "I did not do anything about corruption when I was Prime Minister."

"You can look at my record. There were *wakil rakyat* and exco members who were caught and punished.

"I did a lot, but I didn't want to talk about it.

"I took all kinds of action, but there is no need for me to tell you what they were," he said.

He added that he had even cried, prayed and even stopped elections when dealing with the issue.

However, he said his stress was on building a culture where corruption was not tolerated at all.

"People must reject corruption,

because it is not correct. You do not steal because it is wrong, not because there is a policeman trailing you, waiting to catch you," he said.

Dr Mahathir said his fight against corruption was also hampered by the difficulty in proving that such acts had taken place, both in Umno and in the Government.

"Unless somebody comes up to give evidence, corruption cannot be proven. It is very difficult because everybody will deny that they had done it," he said.

Dr Mahathir added that corruption seemed to have become more rampant.

"After the last Umno assembly, all that people talked about was money politics. There was no discussion on points raised in the president's speech or other issues," he said.

Dr Mahathir suggested that Wong's article could be one way of stopping

him from talking on corruption following his speech on the subject at the Perdana Leadership Foundation discourse on Social Reengineering last month.

During the function, when replying to a question from the floor, Dr Mahathir said people were no longer hiding the fact that they were corrupt.

Voicing his fear that corruption might become institutionalised, he called on the Government and political parties to be more serious in tackling the problem.

On negotiated tenders, Dr Mahathir said that under the open tender system, bumiputra contractors would never have been able to get jobs.

"However, we didn't give all contracts to the same person. We gave to people who were capable and who had delivered," he said.

Nevertheless, he said, it was good that there would now be open tenders.