

05 JUN 2004

Abdullah-Corruption

ABDULLAH WANTS CORRUPTION INDEX TO GO DOWN SIGNIFICANTLY

KUALA LUMPUR, June 5 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said he will only be satisfied when Malaysia's corruption index has improved by leaps and bounds.

"I will be happy with certainty when the corruption index improves," the prime minister said in response to a question from host Lorraine Hahn in a 30-minute interview on CNN's Talk Asia programme aired today.

In Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index for 2003, Malaysia's score of 5.2 ranked the country at 37th out of 133 countries and fifth among Asian countries, after Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan.

Transparency International Malaysia president Tunku Abdul Aziz Tunku Ibrahim had said that Malaysia had been "hovering" around the same level since the ranking was introduced.

Abdullah said he had promised the people to carry on with his campaign to rid the country of corruption without fear or favour.

If a corruption case had to be brought to the court, then it had to be done, but he had always stressed the importance of ensuring that justice was maintained at all times, he said.

Asked about his follow-up actions to the anti-corruption campaign, he said they included constant reminders to the civil servants.

"This is a subject that I always talk about. It is also a subject my other colleagues in the Cabinet talk about," he said.

Abdullah said the National Integrity Plan and the Malaysian Integrity Institute launched on April 23 would also play an important part in the government's effort to curb corruption at all levels.

Abdullah was also asked to comment on his retention of several of former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's ministers in his cabinet, which was said to have drawn disappointment from some people.

"Well, that's the impression they have, but as far as I am

concerned, I must appoint cabinet people that I know and I believe who can perform the job. I've always said that you can use the same vehicle although the driver will change," he said.

To another question, Abdullah reiterated that he was not under Mahathir's shadow.

"No, he (Mahathir) has decided, he told me he would not interfere with whatever I do, he would not comment on whatever I do. He said this is my (Abdullah's) government. You do whatever you want, you are the Prime Minister," he added..

Abdullah also said that the government was making every effort to ensure that Malaysians were united and there were no racial prejudices.

Malaysians must be well-educated and also well-behaved, he said.

On the tensions in southern Thailand, Abdullah, who is also Internal Security Minister, said the situation was a very big concern for Kuala Lumpur.

"This one, it involves the Muslims and they are also Malays. Many of them have relatives on our side of the border. They travel frequently crossing the border, to and from ...everyday. So, anything that happens on that side, I fear, may have repercussions on our side," he said.

However, he was happy with the outcome of the discussions between his Thai counterpart, Thaksin Shinawatra, and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak early last month where Malaysia were given a role to play -- to send religious scholars to give talks on the true teachings of Islam to discourage extremism and militancy in the provinces concerned.

Asked how the government could ensure that the anti-American or anti-Western sentiment would not spill over to Malaysia, Abdullah said

Malaysia had followed a path of moderation, development, national unity and good community relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

"We have been successful because of this. So this we have to maintain at all costs," he said.

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