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Mahathir-Corruption

DR MAHATHIR DISMISSES REPORT ON CORRUPTION

KUALA LUMPUR, May 30 (Bernama) -- Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today dismissed a newspaper report that he should have done more to wipe out corruption during his 22-year stewardship.

Dr Mahathir, who retired in 2003, said the report published in yesterday's issue of The Star gave the impression that he did not do anything to fight the scourge when he was in power.

Last Wednesday, during a question-and-answer session at a seminar at the Perdana Leadership Foundation in Putrajaya, Dr Mahathir said: "Unlike in the past where corrupt practices were made under the table, such practices are slowly emerging above the table and fast becoming a culture in Umno".

In his weekly column yesterday, The Star's senior editor Datuk Wong Chun Wai wrote: "It is good that Dr Mahathir has come out strongly against corruption but personally, I wish he could have done more during his over 20 years in office, such as carrying out anti-corruption campaigns to create awareness of the debilitating impact of corruption".

"With his strong leadership, authority and grip on Umno, he let slip the opportunity to introduce reforms including effective enforcement of laws against corruption," said Wong.

Speaking at a press conference at his residence in Seri Kembangan, which he called specifically to deny the report, Dr Mahathir said he did not plan to speak on corruption at the session, but was merely responding to a question from the floor.

In the past, Dr Mahathir said he had openly shed tears and appealed to God so that the people would inculcate good values by staying away from the evils of corruption.

"This is not about arrests. We can arrest but how many can we arrest and prove in court, only two to three cases only.

"My stress is on the culture of the people. We must reject as this is not good, not because the police are behind us but because we know this (corruption) is not good," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that during the session, he did not touch on the government's efforts to fight corruption as it was very difficult to prove, not unless someone could produce the evidence.

"Unless somebody comes up and gives evidence, you cannot prove. Even in Umno, you cannot prove, everybody will deny. There was once, in the election for Umno Deputy President post, everyone told me that all division chiefs received money especially in Sabah.

"I asked them but nobody wanted to admit that they had received money, as such we cannot prosecute. The same thing in the government, if no one wants to give evidence, it is difficult to prove".

Still referring to Umno elections, Dr Mahathir said if corruption had become part of people's culture, it would be difficult to fight the problem as everyone is involved.

"Things got worse during the elections, everyone told me, with names mentioned, but no one wanted to provide the evidence to the Disciplinary Committee.

"I appeal to the Malays to reject the corruption culture as it will only destroy the race. We must fight the menace by instilling self-discipline and to remind ourselves that corruption will only destroy our country," he said.

" As such, to say that I have not done anything when I was Prime Minister...then, look at the records.

"There are also state assemblymen, excos who have been arrested and charged but I did not mention it, because the most important thing is your culture, but if you want me stop talking (on corruption), then I will do so," he said.

" I don't want to talk about this thing. I have done alot of things (for the country) but I do not have to say what I have done including actions which I do not want to tell people.

" During my time, I think you all know how many times I have spoken out against corruption," he said.

In his column, Wong wrote:"Malaysians may remain grateful to Mahathir for the economic boom,but one source of unhappiness was the introduction of the negotiated tender which lacked accountability and openness. In fact. it was no tender at all".

In response, Dr Mahathir said the problem is, if the tender is open, the Malays and bumiputeras "will never get."

"But we never give to the same person all the time, but to people who are capable and who have delivered. We test them but it is not even to one person but to whole lots of people".

He said the government tried to give contracts to Class F contractors to build computer labs for schools but "you see what happened, they have no experience, everything collapsed".

" I have always maintained that you cannot fight against corruption if it has become your culture. I'm not talking about government action," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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