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Buck up, PM tells local councillors

PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Local councillors who fail to perform and tarnish the Government's image will be removed, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad warned today.

Urging those who failed to buck up to leave, the Prime Minister also suggested a more stringent evaluation mechanism to vet would-be councillors.

Reminding local councillors that their inefficiency would hurt the Government in the long run, he said: "That (tarnishing the Government's image by not serving the people) is the problem.

"But the only advice I can give is that they must remember that in the long run, they are actually destroying the Government's popularity.

"And if they are from the government party, they are doing a lot of damage to the Government in their sometimes corrupt and ineffective ways.

"We will have to find ways to ensure their performance and if they don't perform, we have to remove them," he said at a Press conference after presenting excellence awards at the Finance Ministry here.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, also launched the e-Perolehan Consumer Day exhibition.

Asked about calls for local councillors to be elected, Dr Mahathir said electing them could lead to a bigger mess if the concentration was purely on politics.

"Between appointment and election (of local councillors), I think it's better to appoint.

"I have campaigned in local elections before and the debate during campaigns are not about the situation in the said area. They are not talking about drains or better service or whatever but only national politics.

"They will promote and talk about Umno, Pas or DAP and will not be interested in the needs of the locals but only national politics... they will not be bothered about the local council or local politics.

"So we have to remove politics from some of these government functions, otherwise concentration will be purely on politics."

He said that even in terms of tax collection and other enforcement activities, the Federal Government expected co-operation from the State Governments via local councils but this too had to be "forced" on them.

"Sometimes, of course, the local councillors don't want to be unpopular. So they don't want to collect taxes and things like that... we have to force them."

Asked if a new method should be formulated to ensure local councils and their representatives carried out their responsibilities, he said that even the best system in the world could not be effective if those entrusted with responsibilities were lazy and corrupt.

"No matter how secure your system is, they still come around cloning cheques. Before this it was identity cards and passports.

"Today, technology is such that people can do anything. We have the technology to improve our services and performance, but they abuse the technology to do the wrong thing."

Also present were Second Finance Minister Datuk Dr Jamaludin Jarjis, Deputy Finance Ministers Datuk Dr Shafiee Salleh and Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen and secretary-general Tan Sri Samsudin Hitam.

Yesterday, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk M.

Kayveas, who is also the People's Progressive Party president, had said during his speech at the party's 50th general assembly that local councils were giving the Government a bad name.

Among others, he said, local councils, deemed to be protected by State Governments, acted as though they were a separate colony within the Government and often failed to assist or co-operate with the people.

Kayveas is well-known for his efforts in highlighting corruption and other illegal activities among local council officers, particularly the Ampang Jaya Municipal Council which sacked its chief enforcement officer after the Deputy Minister prompted an official investigation by the Anti-Corruption Agency.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir commended the various arms of the Treasury for their remarkable improvement in enhancing tax collection without antagonising the people.

"Their performance is shown through the increase of tax revenue, including income and corporate tax.

"Our tax collection mechanism is much better than in many countries."