

## **Corruption destroys, warned Najib - in 1997**

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Since taking over the leadership reins in 2009, a raft of allegations centering on corruption have been hurled in the direction of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

The latest, which made international news, concerns RM2.6 billion of 1MDB-linked funds purportedly transferred into his personal bank accounts.

The premier has consistently denied any wrongdoing.

Rewind.

During an anti-corruption conference in 1997, Najib, who was then education minister, delivered a speech on the perils of corruption and how it could dismantle governments.

This was when Dr Mahathir Mohamad was prime minister, the person whom Najib now claims is masterminding his ouster.

"The Roman empire, Ottoman empire, Ming dynasty which were not properly managed saw its army and administrators forced to practice corruption leading to their downfall.

"Similarly, the Malay government in Malacca fell because of corruption amongst the raja and dignitaries.

"The nationalist Chinese government of Chiang Kai Shek, Richard Nixon in the US, (Ferdinand) Marcos in the Phillipines and president Mobutu (Sese Seko) collapsed because of the same thing," he told the audience.

### **Not too late to control**

The pertinent question, according to Najib, was whether corruption had become a culture in Malaysia.

"In my personal view, even as this menace exist and is robbing the rights and interests of the people, it can still be controlled. It is not too late.

"We are fortunate, because this practice is not yet considered 'halal'. It is done in dark places, and under instead of above the table.

"With awareness of Islamic values, fear of punishment, embarrassed of facing the public, fear of being fired (from their positions)... this practice can still be curbed," he added.

Although it cannot be denied that the practice of corruption in Malaysia has increased since the 70s and 80s, Najib said it is not something which is accepted by society.

The then education minister also stressed that in battling corruption, prevention is better than cure, citing the importance of education as well as inculcating the fear of God and divine retribution among others.

He also underlined how corruption could threaten economic growth by driving away foreign investors and cause political instability.

"If corruption becomes a culture, it will cause the public to lose confidence in leaders. At a critical level, the people might revolt as seen in many countries this century," he cautioned.

### **Corruption in politics**

Najib also cited the words of Prophet Muhammad which condemned such practice. "Allah melaknat pemberi dan penerima rasuah (Allah condemns the giver and receiver of bribes)".

"Masuk neraka si pemberi dan si penerima rasuah (The giver and receiver will go to hell)".

Najib also noted that corruption is not only confined to the field of business, but also others such as politics.

"So with regard to debating corruption, I hope the scope is not limited to bribery in the form of money, gifts and other material aspects," he said.

In 1997, Anwar Ibrahim was still deputy prime minister and hence Najib saw it fit to quote an excerpt from his book, *Asian Renaissance*, which reads:

"No excuse for not making a serious commitment to fight it, the issue may be a moral one, but effective measures against corruption must go beyond mere moralising to encompass comprehensive societal and legal reform. There must be the political will to wage war against this insidious blight of mankind."

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