

King wants tougher stand on corruption
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Beh Lih Yi

Intensify efforts to eliminate corruption and abuse of power - Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin made this call in his maiden address when opening the new session of Parliament this morning.

Tuanku Mizan - proclaimed the King on Dec 13 last year for a five-year term - further stressed that the move must include measures to instil integrity.

"The efforts of Prime Minister (Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) should be supported by all members of the civil service and all levels of society," he told the House, which was packed for the ceremonial opening.

The King acknowledged that eliminating corruption and abuse of power is "not a simple task" as it requires co-operation from all parties to refrain from giving or receiving bribes.

"We would like to see more efforts being made to mould Malaysians who are well respected and held in high esteem," he said.

The text of the speech had been presented to him earlier by Abdullah. (Traditionally, the Royal address is prepared by the government.)

The call for a tougher stand comes in the wake of Malaysia's decline in ranking on two separate corruption indexes unveiled recently, as well as two high-profile corruption probes against a deputy minister and the head of the Anti-Corruption Agency.

Abdullah has placed the combating of corruption at the top of his agenda since assuming his post in November 2003.

Reduce inflation

The King also voiced concern for the predicament of low-income earners, following a series of price hikes last year, leading to higher cost of petrol and electricity, while toll charges have also been increased. This has prompted a series of mass demonstrations in Kuala Lumpur.

"Efforts to reduce inflation and unemployment rates should be given due attention. The effect of rising prices of goods, especially on the low income group, must be given particular attention. Enforcement of prices of controlled goods must be stepped up," he said.

Tuanku Mizan said it is his hope to see the government strive to ensure that the country's financial position remains robust, in order to safeguard the stability of the economy.

"The budget deficit which has been reduced to 3.5 percent of gross domestic product should be maintained on its present course."

He expressed confidence that economic growth would show encouraging progress, particularly if measures towards improvement are stepped up.

On another note, the King called for lowering of the income ratio between bumiputeras and Chinese Malaysians to 1:1.5, and between bumiputeras and Indian Malaysia to 1:1.15 by 2010.

He expressed general satisfaction with the government for its achievements in several areas and goals as outlined in the Ninth Malaysia Plan and Third Industrial Master Plan.

However, he reminded the government and the people not to be complacent with the success attained since Independence 50 years ago, saying everyone should strive to ensure the country's prosperity for the next 50 years.

Sympathies to flood victims

At the outset of the Royal address, the King recorded his sympathies to flood victims as he noted that more than 100,000 people had to be relocated during recent severe flooding in the southern states. This has caused estimated losses of about RM1.5 billion.

"In the new year, the entire nation was saddened by the occurrence of floods in several states. This natural disaster was one of the worst ever experienced in the history of our country.

"Together with the Raja Permaisuri Agong, we record our deepest sympathies to those who have lost family members, property and livelihoods as a result of this disaster."

Members of parliament will begin debating the Royal address for eight days from tomorrow. Following this, two days have been allocated for ministerial replies.

The parliamentary sitting will end on May 24. The Dewan Rakyat sitting will take 23 days up to April 26, after which the Dewan Negara will be in session from May 7-24.

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