

Dr M: Comment not fair

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■ By Nik Imran Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said corrupt leaders were prosecuted and convicted while he was Prime Minister, dismissing a newspaper columnist's comments that he had done little to curb graft during his 22-year tenure.

He said his recent statement that corruption was rife was not targeted at the present Government's efforts to curb corruption but was a reminder to Malaysians that they should strive to prevent graft from becoming a culture.

"I have always maintained that you cannot fight corruption if it becomes part of the culture.

"I was not talking about government action (against corruption)," he said.

As an example, Dr Ma-

hathir said he knew it was very difficult to prove (allegations of money politics) in Umno "(as) everybody will deny (having accepted money)".

The former prime minister had called a Press conference at his residence in Seri Kembangan to refute the comments by *The Star* newspaper's deputy editor-in-chief Datuk Wong Chun Wai in his column in *The Sunday Star* yesterday.

Wong, while lauding Dr Mahathir's strong views against corruption, also said: "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.

"... he let slip the opportunity to introduce reforms, including effective enforcement of laws, against cor-

ruption."

Dr Mahathir said the newspaper seemed to blame him for not doing anything about corruption.

"I think it's not fair to say that I have done nothing. Yes, I am very disappointed (with the article).

"It is almost like saying 'you don't talk lah, you also the same lah'. That kind of journalism I don't appreciate."

He said when corruption becomes a culture among the people, there was nothing that could be done to rectify the problem because everyone would be involved.

He said the most important thing was for people to reject the "culture of corruption" instead of thinking that giving and taking bribes was normal.

Dr Mahathir said when he was Prime Minister, State assemblymen and State ex-

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ecutive councillors had been arrested and convicted for graft.

He said he had urged people to reject corruption because it could destroy the whole country, increase costs and retard development.

On another matter, he said, the Government should make public the full list of those who have been given approved permits (AP) to import cars to end suspicions of unfairness in awarding these permits. Dr Mahathir said people in the automotive industry had told him that parallel imports of cars could be three times more than those brought in by approved agents.

"I think the best way to

avoid such accusations of unfairness is by publishing all the names of the people who get the AP, how many they have received and whose plants are assembling what cars," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional (Proton) adviser, said the verification was simple as the Customs Department had the records and import documents.

"Customs should disclose

the actual number (of cars) landed, the actual price paid and the actual tax paid to the Government."

Dr Mahathir said the availability of many imported cars sold at low prices led to suspicions that too many APs had been issued.

He said the availability of a wide range of imported cars in the small-car segment of 1,000cc engines or lower would affect the local automotive industry.