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CIVIL SERVICE

PLUG LOOPHOLES THAT ALLOW OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRAFT

Culture of integrity must start in homes, schools and places of worship

RECENTLY, the Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission (MACC) has cast its net more efficiently across the bureaucracy and caught some high ranking public servants allegedly thieving public money. Its actions must be lauded. However, what is confusing is the sheer extent of the scourge in a profession that pledges to uphold integrity in public services.

For 60 years, our leaders have assiduously built confidence in the public service. That has been a source of pride and competitiveness that has brought Malaysia this far. How did we allow this cancer of corruption to spread with impunity?

Perhaps, the enforcement agencies were sporadic in their past efforts. Perhaps, they operated without much publicity, as now. Such publicity then may have struck fear in the hearts of the corrupt or those contemplating such sin. Perhaps, the institutions entrusted to safeguard the integrity of the service have been weakened by non-action. So much so, errant public servants feel emboldened that they will not be caught out for their misdeeds.

But, do not these miscreants have any fear of God? Or, do they not know that the universal law of nature, that some call karma, will kick in, if not now, then later? For what we sow is what we reap.

A former director-general of MACC once told of this karma. Sometimes, although an officer is corrupt, the agency cannot pin him down for want of evidence. But, eventually, poetic justice is meted out through a fatal disease or calamity that strikes him or his family members.

Regular transfers out of corruption-prone hotspots, now instituted by the public service, and the recent spate of accelerated enforcement must be duly acknowledged as lessening corruption. Caning public servants convicted of corruption, as suggested by the PTD Alumni (Alumni Association of the Administrative and Diplomatic Officers) may prove effective. But, it should go beyond to outright dismissal from service upon conviction, irrespective of the sum involved.

To stanch the erosion of integrity



Citizens cannot despair in coffeeshops over the depth that the public service has descended and resign to their fate that the public service is beyond repair. They should not be jaded by the antics of the few that have gone astray. BY RAMDZAN MASIAM

in the public service, we need persistent and unrelenting enforcement. Departments will need to plug loopholes that offer opportunities for such crime. More importantly, we need to strengthen the moral fibre of integrity that has been woven into the tapestry of bureaucracy.

When the British left us, they left behind an incorruptible system of government. Back then, the public service was small. Its functions were largely limited to safeguarding law, order and security. Now, government complexity in managing a fast-growing nation emasculates effective monitoring of a public servant's behaviour. It provides avenues for personal profit.

Since independence, our political leaders have built on the British legacy of incorruptibility. They have constantly exhorted the public service to uphold integrity. The latest salvo by the prime minister that one should not take what belongs to the rakyat is the epitome of these efforts over the decades.

This value must be embedded in the psyche of public servants. Providing training on integrity, while helpful, will not stir the hearts of those bent on crime. Neither will the dishing out of a glossy code of ethics to recruits nor the recital of the integrity pledge by those in service will do much. Sternly worded memos and circulars or posters and banners declaring the virtues of integrity

may, in all likelihood, be ignored. Only when there are clear signals that crime will not pay will a public servant take serious notice.

Of course, adequate pay, especially for the bottom rungs of the hierarchy, will surely help. But, something's got to give. The government cannot expect to recruit more to solve unemployment, but keep wages depressed to levels that tempt illegal enrichment.

The culture of integrity must start in homes, schools and places of worship. When I was growing up, our pocket money was 10 sen a day. When my incessant pleas for 40 sen to see a Saturday morning matinee fell on my parents' deaf ears, I stole it. My father beat the hell out of me when he found out. He, and the pain of his beating, are long gone. But, the lesson remains as alive as ever — that one should not take what is not one's own.

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It takes two to tango. In the case of corruption, it is the giver and the receiver of a bribe. We must develop a society that disdains corruption. We must demand and build a clean system. We must respect the law in our dealings with the government and eschew the practice of greasing a

public servant's hand whenever we want a favour, especially, if it is against the law.

The public has a great role to play as a vigilante in all this. We must quickly report corrupt practices, whenever and wherever we come across them. We need to keep the system unsoiled, not just for ourselves, but for our children and their children.

There is a Malay proverb: *tegulungu rumah kerana oca tianggaya*. (A house stands steadfast because of its pillars.) Leaders are the pillars of the public service. When leaders walk the talk and are seen to be virtuous, we can see this psyche of incorruptibility developing. When public servants take pride in their noble profession and internalise their sense of duty to the public and stewardship over public funds, only then can we see this psyche fomenting in their hearts and minds. And to give this consciousness a good stir, the public must become active participants in corruption prevention.

The culture of incorruptibility will take long to root, but as Lao Tzu, the ancient Chinese philosopher, once said: "A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step."

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