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ACA should be thorough in probe

A. Kadir Jasin

IT is heartening to see the current campaign against corruption gaining momentum. More people are openly discussing the issue.

On Monday, acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim brought the warning on corruption closer home when he said he had learnt that some Finance Ministry officers were living beyond their means.

This sort of lifestyle, Anwar said, had given rise to allegations that the officers were corrupt. Anwar, who is also Finance Minister, said there were also allegations that some of them had abused their powers by giving opportunities to companies in which they or their families had vested interests.

He warned that action would be taken if the allegations were true. He said it was up to the Anti-Corruption Agency to investigate if there was evidence to back the allegations and the ministry would give its support.

I am sure this is not the last warning on the subject. The suspicion of corruption and abuse of power is so strong that in one or two instances the entire State is under suspicion.

It is learnt that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has given his deputy carte blanche to act on the matter even if it means alienating some State leaders.

Still, history and common sense tell us that we must not be reckless in pursuing this matter. Wisdom and justice must prevail.

While many, in their new-found enthusiasm, may see some logic in the call by Umno Youth chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi for the ACA to reveal the identities of State executive councillors who are under investigation, we must bear in mind that such an action may not be possible or is simply unfair.

But with Umno and the Government having adopted a policy of distancing themselves from leaders who are under suspicion of being involved in corruption or are facing trial, the public can draw its own conclusion when a leader is dropped from his or her post or is asked to go on early retirement.

There is wisdom in not trying to exert unnecessary pressure on the ACA in conducting its investigations. No matter how anxious we are to see a speedy conclusion to investigations involving State executive councillors, Perwaja Steel and other well-publicised cases, we must always bear in mind that the ACA can only investigate.

The A-G has to be satisfied that the case submitted by the ACA is watertight before he decides to press charges.

So, it is best that we leave the matter to the ACA with the understanding that it will do its best.

But if we really want to know or think it is important to satisfy the demands of the Umno Youth chief, we can get around the difficulty by asking or encouraging executive councillors who are not being investigated to say so.

Through the process of elimination, tedious though it may be, we may eventually know who is being investigated and who is not. But then again, not everybody who is the subject of a probe may know or realise that he or she is being investigated.