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Don't spare the rod

HAVE you noticed how a wrong is always dismissed as a mistake in politics and sports when in real life it would constitute a crime?

All those serving time in our prisons pleaded "mistake" too but it didn't do them any good. And rightly so.

But a politician committing an offence overseas would claim it was a mistake despite evidence to the contrary.

An athlete is caught doping and his association says: "Hey, it was a mistake", and go out of their way to get the drug cheat off the hook. Maybe it is the overdose of politicians in Malaysian sport.

An athlete or a national team fare badly and we get the stock reply: "Hey, there was a mistake...."

A developer indiscriminately clears away an entire jungle, a brutal rape of the environment for sheer profit, and the politician says: "Hey, it was a mistake. Why look only on the negative side? What about the good things we have done? We will rectify the mistake."

This will entail replanting trees where there were trees and other greenery in abundance in the first place. And it will never be able to achieve the same biological balance.

And for what. For golf courses and housing estates which queer up the environment and the air we breathe. If it was so good why escape overseas?

If the Prime Minister hadn't spotted that the area had been stripped bare, nobody would have bothered at all.

We cannot wait for the PM or the Deputy Prime Minister to play enforcement officers. They have more important things to do.

The rakyat have to play a more active role. We must be more vigilant. We must keep watch and be more cognitive of what is happening around us. That is our responsibility just as it is to pay our taxes.

We must shed the apathy that has become like a second skin to us. And which has desensitised us to the erosion of moral values.

The indifference which has brought on the social ills which threaten to undermine our progress as a nation and as a people.

It's so upsetting that we have become totally blase to the excesses, the venality and lies. Cocooned in our materialistic mores we appear to have lapsed in so many areas.

This glaring lack of self accountability is what is dragging us into a morass of decadence and shattered morals.

On the one hand, the Government want to promote sports and host major international events like the Commonwealth Games. They have also spared no cost in building some of the best sports infra-structure in the world like the Bukit Jalil Complex.

Yet, they are digging up established sports fields in the cities and universities which have long served the needs of the public and the students.

In Malaysian sport, volunteerism has been another word for abuse. Some officials are motivated by self interest and gain. The free trips abroad, junkets and expense accounts. More so now that there is much money involved.

They would prefer the old way of not having to account for anything. To spend whatever money they are allocated as soon as it comes in.

No checks and balances, thank you all.

That is why it is imperative that the Sports Development Act be ratified

in its entirety, draconian as it may seem.

No sports official need fear if he is really sincere and honest.

It is a fact that some officials are practically getting away with grand larceny in the name of sport. They set up shell companies which handle the jobs which are paid for, in the millions, by the government and the private sector.

If they are caught, they moan: "We work so hard for the sport and this is what we get for a small mistake."

Small indeed. Check out their grand homes, expensive cars and lifestyles. Not a bit of which is funded by their sports connection.

Need a special turf for a new stadium, get it through your own company. Need sports equipment, get it through your son's company.

Need flowers, get it through your daughter's company. Need T-shirts for a tournament, get it through your wife's company. The racket is endless.

They are flourishing but not so their sport in most cases.

And they say the Press is always critical. They have nothing good or kind to say.

The Press is there to play the people's watchdog. It's not a pleasant job but someone has to do it. Its job is to separate the truth from the lies, the right from the wrong.

Someone has to be the voice of reason in the frenzy. To temper and expose the pretence and the subterfuge of those who would blind us with lies and who would have us rejoice for the mediocre.

The corruption and sleaze which promise to end the Conservative Party's long rule in Britain were largely unearthed by the media.

At least in Britain, they resign when they are exposed. In Malaysia they grandstand it in open defiance and call the Press names and brand them liars. Litigation has become a big sport.

But the Press has an obligation. Our society is in a moral dilemma because we have lost touch with reality.

Because we have got too soft. Because we have stopped asking questions. Because we have ceased to chastise our children and our leaders.

That is why we have social problems like drugs, loitering, incest, child abuse, gangsterism etc.

Because we blindly accept whatever is said whether it be advertisement or rhetoric.

In these cynical times we need to keep in touch with reality or we will start to believe like those 39 Heaven's Gate cultists who believed in their destiny in space with the arrival of the Hale-Bopp comet.

But there is no escaping it. The Internet and the MSC, the information revolution, will bring truth right into our homes.

Misdeeds are reported immediately and retribution is almost always instantaneous.

That is where we, as citizens, have to play a role for a better, caring, society.

There has to be regular reality checks whether it be in our personal lives, politics or in sport. This means not getting overly excited or enthralled with a less than great sixth place finish in the hockey World Cup. Or a lucky draw with Saudi Arabia by our soccer team who could not even beat Taiwan.

Or badminton players who are more interested in intrigue and manipulation than winning honours for the country. Or drug cheats who would try to steal glory by artifice. Or officials who would pretend to be other than what they really are. The list goes on and on.

Of course I would love to write more about the truly wonderful moments and those dedicated sportsmen who achieve results on sheer grit and determination alone.

Athletes like young squash players Nicol David and Ong Beng Hee,
bowling's Shalin Zulkifli and officials like athletics' A. Vaithilingam.
But they are so few.

Call me a nasty old cynic if you want, but if that means exposing
misdeeds and cheats, and maintaining a balance - so be it.

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