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Some ways to wage war against corruption in our midst

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MALAYSIANS should salute Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for his courageous mission to uproot the tree of corruption.

Despite great risk, the Government under his leadership is taking positive steps to strengthen the Anti-Corruption Agency by giving it additional powers, staff and other resources.

It is gratifying to note that immediately after the Umno supreme council meeting on June 5, Dr Mahathir came on the air via video link-up to congratulate the supreme council members for taking action against certain members for alleged offences.

He went on to say: "If we do not act, maybe many of them would think that they would be defended, no matter what they do, because we are in power. This is unhealthy for the party and the Government."

The supreme council's decision is an eye-opener to other component parties of the Barisan Nasional and also public officers.

Dr Mahathir's able lieutenant and Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who is currently acting Prime Minister, has spoken vociferously against corruption and abuse of power among politicians and public officers. He has said in no uncertain terms that the Government has sent a clear signal on its stand on corruption and added that it was time to act against corrupt politicians and administrators.

Dr Mahathir's and his deputy's message to the nation has been crystal clear - keep away from graft or it would destroy our country and negate our hard-earned progress and prosperity.

There are adequate laws to curb graft, but as usual, the problem lies with the lack of proper and effective implementation.

Take for example, the declaration of assets by public officers. How effective is this? Are all public officers disclosing their assets and reporting any disposal, if any, within the stipulated time? Are assets of public officers who are known to live beyond their means being scrutinised and disciplinary action taken against those found to have accumulated wealth through foul means?

This exercise will become a farce if not seriously done. The intention behind the move is excellent, but the implementation is far from adequate.

In the same token, the mere declaration of assets by politicians to the Prime Minister or Menteri Besar/Chief Ministers will also not prevent corruption.

Granted that the war against corruption is difficult and full of pitfalls, nevertheless it has to be waged as it (graft) poses a danger and affects our nation's well-being.

However, we must acknowledge that there are a good number of politicians and public officers who are honest, dedicated and committed to their work. Care should be taken not to destroy their enthusiasm and motivation.

Therefore, we must be cautious and avoid jumping to conclusions and condemning those who have been accused of corruption. Some of these allegations may be the result of jealousy or failure to get benefits.

As a former trade unionist, I would urge fellow unionists to instil in their members moral values so that they do not fall prey to the temptations of corruption. They should discharge their duties and responsibilities honestly and abide by the various rules and regulations.

The BN government is strong and stable and has the political will to wipe out, if not at least contain, this scourge.

The ACA should not wait for complaints but, on its own initiative, monitor shady politicians and public officers and act accordingly. For a start, they should work in "posh" housing estates, where politicians and senior public officers live, like Kelana Jaya, Bukit Tunku, Damansara, etc. The cost of the houses there, range between RM1.5 million and RM3 million, not including the fleet of expensive cars in the compound, let alone the contents of the houses.

The ACA should also go undercover in Government departments and agencies.

The "givers" should be heavily punished to serve as a deterrent. If there are no "givers" then there are no "takers".

As education promotes social awareness, it must be given priority to create a strong moral and spiritual base in society.

The media, which is doing an excellent job in fighting graft to evolve a culture of righteousness, should not be contented with interviews and stereotype questions, but should instead train a pool of knowledgeable journalists who would be able to skilfully probe, interrogate, monitor and expose the culprits.

Both the print and electronic media should also educate the general public on spiritual and ethical values and at the same time, get them involved in the fight to wipe out corruption and free society from the clutches of this evil.

There must be greater accountability and transparency. Elected representatives should adhere to the provisions of the General Orders on Conduct and Discipline.

They should declare their assets as well as subsequent acquisitions and even disposals within the stipulated period, to the Election Commission.

Failure to do so or false declaration should result in automatic disqualification and forfeiture of the properties amassed through unethical means, besides imprisonment.

All members of tender committees, especially in the Contract Division of the Finance Ministry and at State levels should be rotated.

Inordinate delays in Government agencies, both at Federal and State levels can result in public officers and politicians taking bribes to get things moving. Therefore, immediate and effective steps should be taken to improve efficiency and give the necessary approvals.

Enforcement officers should also be honest and carry out their duties with great care without succumbing to temptation.

In conclusion, I would like to quote our Prime Minister, and also two other philosophers:

Don't let graft become a part of our culture. - Dr Mahathir Mohamad

A man who permits his honour to be taken, permits his life to be taken.

- Pietro Aretino

A conscience which has been bought once will be bought twice. - Norbert Wierer