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Stop breeding corruption now

CORRUPTION is an insidious and infectious disease which, left unchecked, will weaken the moral fabric of the people, resulting ultimately in a decadent society. The dire consequence of such an evil needs reminding although it may sound familiar to many as we have been told about it often enough.

The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, has again sent a strong message on the evils of corruption and the consequences to the people and country if it is not stopped. In his speech at the opening of the one-day Umno special general assembly last Saturday, he made an impassioned appeal to Umno members to reject all forms of corruption and expose those who offer bribes. In urging Umno members to reject money politics, Dr Mahathir warned that corruption is a crime that will certainly destroy the society which practises it. It is saddening that despite repeated appeals - and warnings - by the country's leaders, the incidence of corruption remains a major problem. It is imperative, as the Prime Minister has again reminded us, that we put a stop to corruption before it becomes a part of our culture. If nothing is done, and done fast, we may just end up legitimising money politics. It will be a sad day indeed if money can buy office and a monetary value is put on a man's vote.

To eliminate this scourge, several government departments have been galvanised into action following repeated complaints from the public. The Road Transport Department recently came down hard on those involved in the driving licences for sale racket. The police have made renewed attempts to stamp out corruption among its ranks. The ACA is seen to be more active in its anti-corruption drive and has widened its fight to cover corrupt practices in the private sector as well. The ACA is right in targeting both the giver and the receiver of bribes because both are equally guilty in perpetuating corruption. A gift for a small favour may seem harmless. But, as it so often happens, this is the beginning: the seed of corruption is planted. The bribes become bigger and more widespread, and the line between right and wrong is eventually blurred. Moral values will be submerged in the greed for money and favours. If anything can be bought for a price and if those in power or authority find nothing morally wrong in doing something against their conscience if the price is right, then they have forfeited the moral right to exercise that power or authority. The people will gradually lose their confidence and respect for those in power and once this is lost, it is very difficult to win them back.

Great empires and civilisations have fallen not only as a result of attacks from external forces but also because of the unseen enemy of corruption in their midst. A big elephant may not be able to knock down a tree but the tiny termites can, given enough time. The Roman Empire built magnificent buildings and imposed a uniform administrative and legal system. But then lavish living and rampant corruption seeped into Roman society and sapped its strength just when its enemies were knocking at the door. Foreign aggression helped bring down the Ching dynasty in China but foreign forces would not have so easily defeated the Chinese if the imperial court and the bureaucracy itself was not greatly weakened by massive corruption in which government positions could be had for a price. These are glaring lessons of history which the corrupt of today should learn before society pays dearly for their greed.

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