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The police must uphold the law

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NO matter how high the acknowledgement we accord former Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Rahim Noor for his services to the country, we cannot but agree with the court that his offence against former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was a serious one.

Even Rahim, albeit after a long delay and under investigation by a special Government-appointed panel, admitted to causing hurt to Anwar while the latter was in police custody in September, 1998.

On Wednesday, Rahim was sentenced to two months' jail and fined the maximum RM2,000 for causing hurt to Anwar.

He had, the day before, changed his plea to guilty to a lesser charge of causing hurt.

Rahim was earlier charged with attempting to cause grievous hurt.

The former IGP pleaded guilty to punching and hitting a blindfolded and handcuffed Anwar at the Bukit Aman lock-up about 10.45pm on Sept 20, 1998. The maximum sentence under the amended charge is a jail term of one year or fine or both.

Kuala Lumpur Sessions Court judge Akhtar Tahir, in sentencing Rahim, said public interest demanded that the sentence must not only be a lesson to the accused but also to the public.

"And because the accused is a former IGP, the sentence will be a lesson to the police force to be mindful not to ignore the law when carrying out their duties to uphold peace in the country," he said.

Akhtar said the court did not make light of the offence of a person causing physical hurt to another person, whether it be a dignitary or a maid.

But the prosecution considered the sentence inadequate. A statement from the Attorney-General's Chambers issued immediately after the sentencing said the Attorney-General, Tan Sri Mohtar Abdullah, had ordered the appeal for a higher sentence.

Regardless of the outcome of the appeal, the fact remains that the offence was committed in what can be considered bizarre circumstances. And that it involved the highest-ranking law enforcement officer and a once powerful politician in the country made it even more compelling. One cannot agree more with the judge that the sentence would be a lesson to police personnel not to ignore the law when carrying out their duties. While we are fully supportive of the police force in its challenging task of maintaining law and order, we must not forget that the law of the land protects every person who lives in this country.

With the benefit of hindsight, even the media should accept some measure of responsibility for not pursuing the incident more vigorously when it happened. I am not excluding myself from the responsibility.

IT is not every often - in fact it is very rare - for the head of a government department to admit the wrongdoings of his subordinates. More often, he or she will vehemently deny any accusation against his or her department.

Very often the media is accused of sensationalism.

So it came as a great relief when on Wednesday, Road Transport Department director-general Datuk Mohd Shahar Sidek openly admitted that some of his officers were involved in manipulating records of stolen vehicles.

He went on to promise action against the officers, saying that the

department would lodge a police report soon.

Although the number of officers suspected of being involved is small - two or three according to Shahar - their activities constitute a serious crime and breach of public confidence.

Given the less than clean image of the department and the many complaints by the public, one cannot fault the aggrieved motor vehicle buyers for their plan to sue the agency for negligence.

It was reported that 14 motorists who unknowingly purchased stolen cars which were re-registered with the RTD intend to sue the department. They also plan to sue finance companies, if their vehicles were bought under hire purchase, and individual sellers in the event of cash purchases.

Shahar should be commended for his action, though he has to work harder to convince the public that the action of the corrupt officers "does not reflect on the department's credibility".

Still it is bravery of sorts for Shahar to make the admission and he must be prepared to be an outcast in his department and among other senior civil servants.

IT is ritualistic and is called *tunjuk muka*. That is what some businessmen do when they follow the Prime Minister or other leaders on their local and foreign trips.

Their sole purpose is to register their presence. Business is not on their minds - at least not in the places visited by the dignitaries. This does not, however, mean that they do not take the exercise seriously. They do.

While they may not be seeking to do business in Indonesia, which Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad recently visited, or anywhere else in the world, they use such trips to touch base with whoever is the mission leader. It appears that overseas trips in particular are popular with businessmen because they have the mission leader to themselves for several days, during which they take full advantage to inform him or her of their next endeavour.

They are not the worst type. There are those who join these missions purely for fun. The trips offer them an excuse to get away from home and office - usually on company time and money.

These are the people who tend to cause the missions problems and embarrassment, as Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin highlighted during the Prime Minister's visit to Jakarta last week.

They are more likely to use these important trips to impress - with their expensive suits, their diamond-studded wrist watches and their endless but empty memorandums of understanding.

The media had highlighted this often enough in the past, sometimes at its own peril.

Reports have been published of businessmen being unhappy with travel arrangements. Of not being seated close enough to the Prime Minister in the aeroplane and at dinners. Of poor accommodation and hectic schedules. Some even complained about the size of the towels, as happened during the Prime Minister's trip to the then USSR in 1987.

Unfortunately, as had been highlighted in this column as early as 1993, the presence of these people was not without the knowledge and consent of the officials who put together the visits.

This is not new either. It has happened with every Prime Minister. In some instances quite deliberately because the size of the mission counts. Some come along to make up the number.

Only greater scrutiny and detailed planning of the private sector component of the mission will lessen the problems caused by the hangers-on.

In reality, not every serious businessman likes to participate in overseas trips because they are time-consuming and costly. Many do so out of respect for the Government and the leader of the mission.

Maybe it is better to base future missions on quality of participation than on the size of its membership.

A RECENT trip back to Alor Star put me in touch with two former teachers to whom I dearly owe part of my schooling.

One taught me Bahasa Malaysia and the other Malay literature at St Michael's Secondary School in Alor Star.

They retired some years ago as headmasters and are now spending time on social work and taking care of their grandchildren.

They cannot be more different. The older of the two has always been reserved, soft-spoken and pious. He was so unintimidating that a few of us thought nothing of bullying him into donating money for school clubs and associations.

He taught us what it took to be good students and better human beings later in life.

Of course, it was boring. As teenagers, we wanted to have fun and be bad. He could not help us in that department.

He went on to be awarded the State and Federal Tokoh Guru titles for his achievement. Recently, he was made a Datuk by the Sultan of Kedah.

He is as humble as ever and remains a staunch supporter of Umno and the Government.

The other is a man of rumbustious character but kind and generous.

He was ever ready to take us into his house, feed us and even lend us his Volkswagen beetle.

Needless to say, he was also responsible for teaching us the ways of the world - both good and bad.

It may be rare and unthinkable today, but back in the 1960s we dabbled in menurun nombor ekor. People would go to great lengths to seek the magical four-digit lottery number from all manner of spirits, hantu and penunggu.

This younger teacher was once a believer in the magic of minyak pengasih - the love potions that would help you win the heart of the girl of your dream effortlessly.

Of course, like the empat nombor ekor given to you by the spirits, who very often spoke with a Thai slang, the love potions never worked.

The pantun, sajak and a finely crafted surat cinta written on scented paper worked better.

Though now a grandfather, he remains fun-loving and in the last general election supported Pas. He said he is only a pemeriksa kira-kira (auditor) for the party's local ranting (branch).

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