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Anything that corrupts corrupts anything

CORRUPT leaders belong in life's rubbish bin. We don't need such leaders, and we are not just talking about political leaders, or corrupt politicians in Umno and parties in the Government. We don't need corrupt Opposition leaders as well. Malaysians should reject and fight all forms of corruption. Corrupt business people, corrupt cops, corrupt journalists, corrupt parents and corrupt regulators. Anything that corrupts will corrupt anything; anyone who is corrupt will try to corrupt everyone else. If this spectre is not exorcised from our lives, we all will end up in life's rubbish dump.

The history of the world is littered with stories about corrupt individuals and how their greed brought destruction to nations and sufferings to people. During the 18th century, high-ranking officials of the English East India Company would each take bribes valued today at over a billion pound sterling precipitating, many historians believe, the downfall of the British Empire in the East. Towards the end of that century the British Parliament tightened the laws to prevent the Queen's subjects in the colonies from becoming "filthy rich", but they continued to take bribes, also known as gifts, stipends, royalties and other sweeter-sounding names. The same tales are found in other cultures, from the Romans to the Malaccan Sultanate and through the ages.

Towards the end of the 1990s, governments of countries hit by the Asian financial crisis were accused of corruption. The difference between what history teaches us and what we were accused of after the 1997 crisis is that the West was taking a high moral position as a weapon to put pressure on others. It was unacceptable. Yet Malaysians have been told by their own leaders that corruption is rearing its ugly head in various fields, be it in politics or business. And Malaysians accept that they must fight this disease. When they rejected the Western idea that governments in this region were corrupt, it was due to the holier-than-thou approach the prosecutors took. To read George Soros writing about "unholy alliances" between the Malaysian Government and businesses in this country, for instance, is a great insult. This was the man who corrupted the currency markets with manipulation to profit the wealthy people who invested in him and his hedge funds.

The temptation to take bribes is human; the ability to resist is divine. Umno's leaders have admitted that the party is under siege from various kinds of corruption. The subject of money politics has been discussed at Umno's general assemblies since before the Asian crisis happened and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was convicted of corrupt practices. The country's courts have jailed senior Umno and MCA politicians found guilty of corruption before Anwar. Umno has taken disciplinary action against corrupt members.

The fight against corruption within Umno has always been news because it is the largest political party in the country and in the ruling coalition. And it has become even more interesting in recent weeks. Last week six members, including a veteran leader, were suspended from the party or sacked. Likewise, six members were taken to task by the party's disciplinary committee in early May. For whatever reason, some quarters are trying to cast doubt over the integrity of the committee. But surely Malaysians will agree that the time for sweet talking people to reject and resist corruption is over. And that Umno or its president, Prime Minister

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, should not be alone in waging this war to defend the nation's proud achievements and integrity.

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