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Ending fraudulent withdrawals

THE people's hard-earned money kept in trust in a Government agency should always be guarded with extreme care. But if this trust risks being undermined because of criminals out to cheat the system, then prompt action must be taken to restore public confidence. This is especially so if it is a public institution, such as Tabung Haji which collects money from the people to help them perform one of their principal religious obligations.

Government officials and even Ministers must listen to experts - those in the investment panel - if they venture into countries and territories not very well known for transparency, especially when huge sums of money are invested.

The public should therefore welcome the tighter procedures imposed by Tabung Haji for the withdrawal of deposits and the plugging of loopholes in pensions and other payments by the Government and Socso. The money kept in Tabung Haji amounts to RM10 billion, and this will increase over time. Pension payments by the Government totalled RM3.5 billion last year to 450,00 retired civil servants while Socso now pays an annual RM608 million in pensions and other benefits. The sums involved are huge and thus the heavy responsibility of safeguarding the money. There have been cases of fraudulent withdrawals such as the RM7.725 million from Tabung Haji and unauthorised persons cashing pension warrants.

The new measures taken should go a long way towards restoring public confidence in the system. However, despite this, it must also be remembered that it is very difficult to build a fool-proof system against crooks and cheats.

Whenever improvements are made to secure the system against fraud and cheating, greedy and determined criminals will find the means to beat the system. Thus, staff at all levels must watch out for any lapses which could allow for fraudulent withdrawals. Perhaps there could be random checks to ensure that pension payments do not go to the wrong persons.

Those who abuse the system and pocket the money that does not belong to them should be quickly brought to justice. This would serve as a deterrent to potential crooks.

Must we always wait for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to push, and only then things begin to happen.

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