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## Honouring men of integrity

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Transparency International Malaysia's National Integrity Medal will be awarded posthumously to Tun Tan Siew Sin, Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman and Tun Ismail Mohamad Ali for their values and commitment to integrity in a ceremony on June 28.

Why award the medal to those who are no longer living? This is something Transparency International Malaysia president Tunku Abdul Aziz Tunku Ibrahim has been explaining on numerous occasions.

"People have been making jokes about why we are giving awards to those who are dead and if we cannot find anyone living who can match them," he said.

The reason, he said, was that Tan, former MCA president, Finance Minister and later chairman of Sime Darby Bhd, Dr Ismail, former Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister and Ismail, former Bank Negara Malaysia Governor, Permodalan Nasional Bhd and Sime Darby chairman, shared an uncompromising commitment to integrity.

"These three people really represent the best of Malaysian, and also universal, values. These were men of great education and experience, men who played a big role in the birth of our nation in its early development and great role models by any standard," he said in a recent interview.

He said the independent anti-corruption organisation felt that there should be a revival of their memory because Malaysia needed examples of men of honour, integrity and honesty to inspire its people.

"We have achieved a great deal materially but the way ahead is still littered with all kinds of examples of unethical behaviour and very low standards of ethics," he said.

He cited examples such as the cheating scams involving Tabung Haji and the fraudulent withdrawals of the Employees Provident Fund as a marker of "the lowering of standards of behaviour".

"This is not just in the public sector, which we have been turning the spotlight on for a long time. As we have come to realise, the private sector is very much part of the problem of corruption or unethical behaviour."

The awards, he said, were to remind people that Malaysia was not always what it seems to be today in terms of ethics.

He said there was a time when values inculcated by the lives of men such as Tan, Dr Ismail and Ismail Ali "mattered more than they seem to do today".

A nation's progress, he said, could be completely undermined if people did not feel outraged and angry by corruption, whether it was petty corruption, political corruption, money politics or simply unethical behaviour.

At the end of the day, people in responsible positions or entrusted with power had to understand the concept of stewardship as the power was not theirs but given to them to exercise, he said.

If, he said, a country was depicted as less than honest or did not have good governance in place then foreign investors would also decide to put their money somewhere else.

Tunku Abdul Aziz said Malaysia still had an image problem when it came to corruption, but that things were looking up as the Government had recently come out very strongly against money politics and unethical behaviour.

"Of course we cannot change things overnight ...(but) we feel at long last we are working in tandem with not just the Government, but civil organisations and the corporate sector."

The awards ceremony, which he called a "celebration of ethics", was expected to be attended by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and International Institute for Public Ethics president Professor Charles Samford from Australia.

The awards will be collected by representatives from the three men's families, who Tunku Abdul Aziz said would mostly likely be Tan Siok Choo (Tun Tan's daughter), Mohd Tawfik Tun Ismail (Tun Dr Ismail's son) and Kamal Tun Ismail (Tun Ismail's son).

Tunku Abdul Aziz said he felt honoured and privileged to have worked closely with the late Tun Ismail in Bank Negara and with the late Tun Tan, both of whom he described as "moral and ethical leaders".

"My first and most lasting impression of Tun Ismail was that while he wanted the best for his race, he was not a racist. This is very important in the context of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society," he said.

He recalled an incident in which Bank Negara was recruiting young economists for the bank and he had discussed with Tun Ismail the list of candidates he was going to interview.

"My list had 20 people and all were non-Malays. When I said to him, 'I am sorry I did a very thorough search and could not find a Malay candidate', he replied 'We have to look for the best, irrespective of who they are'," he said.

He also said that having worked in several organisations, he knew of senior directors who would think nothing of asking for privileges that were not due to them.

"The governor had never once asked for anything. This again shows that he understood his role as a custodian of the bank's assets."