

MACC is 'busy being busy' in graft war
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COMMENT The Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission (MACC) figures, at first glance, make "impressive" reading. They had some help in dissemination from national news agency Bernama, going by the latest reports splashed in the mainstream media, and duly noted by some of the alternative media if not the bloggers.

From January to July this year alone, 7,224 corruption cases were reported to MACC and it opened 803 case files, leading to 519 arrests (165 civil servants, 33 private sector individuals and 319 others) and "shockingly", only two politicians. One would have expected action against more politicians, considering their lifestyles. Business reporters and political writers with the mainstream media are not among them either.

Half the 519 cases reportedly involved bribe-takers. But what about NONE the bribe-givers? Then comes another vital fact: The cases involved bribes amounting to a grand total of RM6.2 million. No mistake.

One thing that we can be sure of is that the administrative costs alone for tackling these cases will be more than RM6.2 million when the final bill is tallied.

That doesn't mean that these cases shouldn't be prosecuted. Bribes are bribes, given or taken, and corruption is corruption. It is a cancer. It eats away at the body politic, drives up the cost of doing business, erodes competitiveness, increases the national debt burden, postpones an equitable sharing of the economic cake, saps public confidence in the system, and more.

Fighting a losing battle, like the ACA

This brings us to why the MACC appears to be fighting a losing battle, like its predecessor the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA), which eventually bit the dust after many years of going through the motions. It cannot be any different when the commission, like the ACA, is gamely fighting against all odds with both hands tied by the powers-that-be, while the public tells it to perform.

The thrust of the fight against corruption in the country must focus on the politicians in the corridors of power and government-linked companies (GLCs), both state and federal. This is not being done. It's not known why the MACC is not going after the GLCs, but in the case of politicians in government, no case file can be sent to the public prosecutor without the prime minister's sanction.

This must explain why Sarawak Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud, bn supreme council mt meeting sapp sabah issue 190608 taib mahmud(right) for one, seems to be leading a charmed life since 1981. Not a day goes by without some expose or other about Taib's excesses in the alternative media. It appears that no amount of adverse reporting on Taib can persuade the MACC that "something stinks to high heaven" and to spring into action.

The least the MACC can do is to send Taib a letter requesting him, his immediate family, relatives and friends to list their assets and account for their jet-set lifestyle. Not a chance, it seems. Taib, fighting a seemingly losing battle with a bout of colon cancer, remains as unrepentant as ever. He clings on to power ferociously, with what little strength he can muster.

Still, like Perkasa's Ibrahim Ali, MACC thinks: "Where's the proof? There's corruption everywhere in the world, not just in Malaysia." So, they are resigned to an apa boleh buat? (what to do?) on Taib.

Obviously, the MACC - like the Election Commission (EC), the police, the attorney-general's chambers, the judiciary and the registrar of societies - is more concerned that BN continues to hold on to the 31 parliamentary seats in Sarawak. Taib is seen to be the man for that. So, this man can get away with murder even - literally speaking - in the process. Still, there's always the hope that something has to give

way, sooner or later.

Deep rot in the GLCs too

The GLCs are another area where the rot has set in deep, as evident from the opposition's focus on the Federal Land Development Authority (Felda), and the unfolding saga at Sime Darby.

Felda has touched a raw nerve in Umno as the settlers have long been a captive vote bank for the ruling party. Their market has long been assured in India and more recently, in China. Now India is looking more towards Indonesia for its palm oil needs. This could spell the beginning of even more trouble for Felda as the mystery of its depleted cash reserves refuses to go away. And still, there's no sign of MACC on the horizon.

In the case of the GLCs, the national interest and the economy take a backseat while the politically well-connected make hay while the sun shines, or otherwise embark on their own personal empire-building.

If Sime Darby, the biggest of the GLCs, can be found wanting and azlanfall by the wayside, what hope is there for the others? There's more to come in the days, weeks and months ahead. It would be interesting to keep an eye on CIMB, for one, to gauge the health of the country's financial system.

It was former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad who put in this system, giving carte blanc to a tiny circle in the ruling elite, with fat cats in tow, to commit the worst forms of abuses and get away with it.

ACA files sent to Mahathir were invariably locked away in his safe, unless it was politically expedient for him to throw someone to the wolves now and then to keep up appearances. Sacrifices had to be made from time to time, Mahathir reckoned, but not from among those whom he allowed to benefit, whether from nepotism, cronyism, collusion or corruption under him.

Ironically, this was the man who suddenly came to power in 1981 on the back of that infamous slogan of Bersih, Cekap, Amanah (BCA) - NONEclean, efficient, trustworthy - but presided over some of the worst excesses of the Barisan Nasional's half-century rule. There's a man called Barry Wain who has done some documentation on this for the benefit of all Malaysians.

Noted for slogan-mongering and quick fixes rather than long-term solutions, Mahathir used BCA quite successfully to remove countless hundreds from their positions. This allowed him to bring his own people into the gravy train. Thereafter, no more was heard about BCA except as a butt of jokes by the Democratic Action Party - but to no avail as there was no alternative media then.

It appears that things have not really changed in the fight against corruption in the post-Mahathir era. The more things appear to change, the more they remain the same. It is quite clear that the MACC has been given a blank cheque to go after opposition politicians only - as can be seen in Perak, Selangor and Penang.

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