

One more question for Pak Lah
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In the not too distant past, a journalist had posed 22 questions to former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the 22 years he was in office.

The questions ranged from corruption to the dismissal of his protege-turned-nemesis Anwar Ibrahim.

Mahathir's successor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi took over the reins in 2003, and within a span of four years, the fledgling prime minister seems to have dozens of questions on his plate.

The shocking developments over the past few days warrant another question to be added to the pile.

Why did Abdullah extend the tenure of Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) director-general Zulkipli Mat Noor in the wake of so many allegations against the latter?

This is unbecoming of a prime minister, who on numerous occasions, made it crystal clear that he has zero tolerance for corruption. In fact, this uncompromising stand was one of the key factors in securing an enviable victory for the ruling front in the 2001 polls.

He had lit the flame of hope in many a heart for a better Malaysia when he vowed to net the big fishes.

If the West had its caped crusaders like superman and batman to keep the streets safe, Malaysians felt secure knowing they had the batik-clad Mr Clean to protect them.

Unfortunately, this was short-lived and Abdullah's anti-corruption drive has been anything but marvel. Now, the Zulkipli saga has dealt it a bloody nose.

Clean slate

To be fair, the allegations have yet to be proven. But on the same note, the ACA is a sacrosanct body and its chief must be immaculate with nothing short of a clean slate. Anything suggesting the contrary, would erode public confidence.

Following an explosive revelation on Feb 26, Malaysians are now forced to come to terms with the appalling possibility that the top man in the premier's campaign against the corrupt, could be corrupt himself.

He is accused of amassing properties and wealth beyond the source of his known income. He is also said to have numerous business interests.

This time around, the allegations did not appear on blogs, which are proving to be the biggest bane for the Abdullah administration, but in a report penned by an ex-top ACA officer to the former inspector-general of police.

Copies of the report were also sent to Abdullah, the attorney-general, the auditor-general and

the civil service director-general. What came of all this ink and paper, remains a mystery.

To make the picture bleaker, the report also revealed that Zulkipli was accused of a sex crime and assault by a housewife in 1997.

The current inspector-general of police disclosed that the investigation papers have now been resubmitted to the attorney-general's office. The papers were initially handed over shortly after the woman had filed her police report.

The attorney-general claims that Zulkipli was cleared of these charges. However, the allegation that the ACA chief had intimidated witnesses makes it pertinent that the case be re-investigated.

Credibility at stake

This is a damning scenario indeed.

Should there be grounds to believe that the allegations could have some semblance of truth to them, the repercussions, both political and otherwise, would be devastating.

On the political front, the Abdullah administration, which is already besieged with innumerable problems, would have to push its spin doctors into high gear.

They must heal the wound as soon as possible as the controversy would be a boon for the opposition, especially with the elections around the corner.

Secondly, apart from the disturbing prospect, and at the same time, almost tragically burlesque situation of Malaysia having a corrupt individual spearheading an anti-corruption watchdog, it would also unlock a Pandora's box in terms of the cases investigated by the ACA.

Zulkipli was appointed as ACA director-general in 2001. Since then, hundreds of reports have been filed with the agency, including those against ministers and top politicians.

To date, no real big fish has been hauled to court. But now, aspersions have been cast on the angler himself and this in turn casts doubts on the impartiality and integrity of the agency.

Has the ACA executed its duties without fear or favour for the past six years, or should the high-profile investigations stamped 'case closed' be reopened?

Abdullah is currently on a visit to Yemen. The nation awaits eagerly for the prime minister's return to hear his comments on this disheartening development.

As for Zulkipli, who has since denied the allegations, he should be suspended until a full and thorough investigation is carried out to clear the air.

And not forgetting Mahathir. Here is question No 23. Why did you appoint a person with so many allegations against him as the ACA director-general in the first place?