

Liew skirts the real issues on corruption
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Deputy Federal Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, V. K. Liew, would have us all believe that the ruling Barisan Nasional government, if not Umno, is "serious about combating corruption in the country".

However, in an interview with the Astro Awani on Wed (Dec 8), he provides no proof at all, and certainly inspires no one on the government's "seriousness" in combating corruption.

Liew trots out any number of cosmetics on the battle against graft. These include setting up courts in certain major towns and cities to specifically hear corruption cases. This is something that has to be seen to be believed. The people want to see the big fish hauled before the courts and punished, if found guilty, with a long stretch behind bars.

NONElsewhere, he cites the WhistleBlowers Protection Act 2010 to be enforced on Dec 15. Liew sees the new Act as a panacea and will be going around the country if necessary, like some sort of latter-day messiah, to tell all and sundry on what the new Act means.

His road shows, the term used by him, will help complement and supplement his many interviews and dialogues with TV stations on the issue.

Liew is confident that the Attorney General will take the necessary action against the suspected wrong-doers when he receives information which contain elements that are criminal in nature. Three examples are anything found to be in breach of trust, theft or other offences under the Penal Code.

The fine print is that the fight against corruption cannot be done unilaterally, points out Liew. "It must be done together (i.e. the government and the people)".

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Or as an ancient Chinese proverb goes, "the fish rots from the head". What we need is a comprehensive Act against corruption, not so much a Whistle Blowers Act, to tackle the growing menace.

Power of anonymous in graft bursting

NONEinformation on the corrupt can still be collated without a WhistleBlowers Act. For example, the Attorney-General, opposition leaders, the police or the press can receive a file mysteriously in the mail, in the post box or on the door-step. In that sense, the WhistleBlowers Act is mere cosmetics and theatrics on the part of the government.

It's unlikely that anyone will come forward under the new Act. Malaysians generally want to see action taken on wrong-doings but they don't want to be the ones to stick their necks out to see justice done. Everybody waits for somebody else to help end the corruption scourge in the country.

At best, some are willing to dash off a surat laying (anonymous flying letter). They live in fear of fear. Liew has already pronounced defeat even before the battle begins by warning that this fight cannot be undertaken unilaterally.

As it stands, the WhistleBlowers Act will fall by the wayside. Umno will continue the time-honoured tradition, with or without the Act, of going after the small fry. The big fish, with some notable exceptions, will generally make pious declarations on the need to fight corruption.

Has anyone heard Sarawak Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud, or any of his senior ministers, make a speech in recent years on fighting corruption in Sarawak? Their silence on the issue speaks volumes.

The time-honoured tradition can be seen from the fact that the number of Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission (MACC) files opened this year alone, an incredible 700-odd, involves only some RM6 million in bribes. The administrative costs in prosecuting these cases alone will entail much more than the measly RM6 million corruption.

There's a dire need for a proper Act that will define corruption and corrupt acts to the fullest extent possible to put the fight against the scourge on a war footing. Such an Act must be linked to specific case studies to be conducted on Taib and the system of negotiated government tenders, contracts and procurement.

The Act must differentiate between genuine development and development for the sake of development to facilitate corruption and corrupt acts.

Profit-making blind eye

The mother of all issues in corruption and corrupt acts is the current system of turning a blind eye to abuse of public office for private gain and criminal breach of trust under the guise of the "politics of development", the New Economic Policy, building a bumiputera industrial and commercial community, and Malaysia Boleh (Malaysia Can), among others.

The proposed Act must frown on the widespread practice of collecting government contracts, tenders, permits, concessions and quotas, under whatever guise, for re-sale or collecting rental income.

The authorities in Malaysia must also make common cause with their counterparts overseas to trace and bring back ill-gotten gains, including from the spoils of office and sharing the loot, salted away outside the country.

All those in public office must undergo a mandatory financial audit every year under the proposed Act. They must receive a clean bill of health under the law, from the MACC, to be eligible to continue in public office. Taib should be the first one to be audited, followed by former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and others.

There should also be an amnesty provision in the proposed new Act. This will encourage wrong-doers to come forward and confess their sins. In return for providing information on how they managed to indulge in corruption, and fingering others as well by turning state's evidence, they can be left off the hook with suspended sentences reduced to community service.

This may include helping to clean and man the network of public toilets for example, refuse collecting and clearing, maintaining public parks and areas landscaped by local governments and tutoring poor children in the shanty towns and rural areas.

All their ill-gotten gains must be surrendered to the state in consideration, if necessary, for

a modest state pension.

Liew should think out of the box to get his colleagues in government to be serious about a phenomenon which is as insidious as cancer. Wither our sense of civics, moral values, ethics and religious beliefs!

Corruption tears away at the very social fabric of the country, sows jealousy and envy, destabilizes our politics while compromising our national security, drives up the cost of doing business, keeps the country uncompetitive and unproductive, renders the eradication and elimination of the grinding poverty in the country an impossible task and indebts the unborn for generations to come.

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