

**Why the MACC will not touch Taib Mahmud**  
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COMMENT The perennial question in Sarawak, as elsewhere in Malaysia, is why the Malaysian Anti Corruption Agency (MACC) has not asked Sarawak Chief Minister Taib Mahmud so far to account for living beyond his means i.e. his known sources of income. The Inland Revenue Board (IRB), among others, can go after Taib as well but clearly nothing is happening from that direction.

Just two examples will suffice i.e. the Rolls Royce cars in his garage, one personal and the other owned by the state government. This is a reflection on accounting standards as well in Sarawak.

The question that arises here is how the Chief Minister of Sarawak can afford a personal Rolls Royce on his monthly salary of RM 20,000 even if he saves all of this as he literally starves to death at his residence in the proverbial rags.

In the case of the state government-owned Rolls Royce for the Chief Minister, this reeks of abuse of power and an exercise in absolute power. \*\*\*If the Chief Minister rides in a Rolls Royce, what about the Governor? Should he ride in a twice extended Rolls Royce? And all this when the people of Sarawak are wallowing in the depths of extreme poverty as the second most backward state in Malaysia after Sabah?\*\*\* This is a blot on Sarawak, the second poorest state in the country, and an even great blot on Malaysia.

The state government-owned Rolls Royce merits a class action suit against the Chief Minister but no lawyer in Sarawak will take such a case. Lawyers from outside the state will be barred by the Immigration Department from entering Sarawak or if they are allowed to enter, they will not be admitted even temporarily to the local bar or be given a work permit. The Sarawak Advocates Association, with an eye on state government and GLC jobs, will object.

So far, the MACC has only gone after the small fry in Sarawak and elsewhere in the country. The number under investigation for this year alone is impressive. However, the total sum in corruption money involved is a measly RM 6 million-odd. The administrative costs entailed in taking action against these small fry will be much more than the RM 6 million-odd involved.

The only way to economically justify the MACC action against the small fry is to go after the big fish as well. There's no chance of this happening at all unless they are from the opposition or from among the smaller BN leaders who have fallen out of favour with Putrajaya.

To be fair, the Anti Corruption Agency (ACA) did raid Taib's office once and that of his brothers and close relatives and cronies. Taib's response was to call then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and demand an explanation. It's not known how Mahathir responded. But it's widely whispered in the corridors of power in Kuching that Taib wanted Mahathir to answer this question: "Who is more corrupt? Mahathir or Taib?" Apparently, that was the end of the ACA designs on Sarawak.

It is not known why Mahathir sent the ACA after Taib. But what is known is that Mahathir detests Taib no end for some reason. It may be the latter's membership in the Freemasonry movement, which Mahathir faults for the jailing of former Umno strongman Harun Idris, or

it may be something else. He even had Taib demoted to Federal Territory Minister under the Hussein Onn administration. This was an insult that Taib never forgot and relations between the two men, Mahathir and Taib, have never been easy since then.

When Mahathir decided to go after Joseph Pairin Kitingan in Sabah hammer-and-tongs, and all because he wanted to rule his own state as a member of the majority community, he was forced to eat humble pie in private and patch up with Taib. The Sarawak strongman has never been impressed however with Mahathir when it came to handling money. He would probably agree with Barry Wain, who wrote "Malaysian Maverick", on Mahathir's inability to handle money prudently.

The ACA episode in Sarawak shows who gives the orders to MACC. No action can be taken against a senior Barisan Nasional (BN) leader without the express approval of the Prime Minister. Even then the investigation file has to be sent to the PM himself to approve any prosecution or persecution as the case may be.

This also shows that the MACC is powerless to act against the Prime Minister himself. \*\*\*That's why nothing will come out repeated allegations involving the payment of some RM 500 million in unjustified payments to Abdul Razak Baginda and wife in the matter of two submarines purchased by Malaysia. Everyone knows who the Bagindas represent. \*\*\*

To be fair to Taib, it's not the widespread disclosure that he has a billion dollar property and Investment Empire overseas that incriminates him although politically embarrassing for the son of a fisherman. The day-to-day dealings can be easily explained and the sources of income justified. Once you have the first million, by hook or crook, you are on the way to making the other millions provided you don't indulge in conspicuous consumption. Taib, unlike other Bumiputera, has been careful and prudent on that score. He's Mr Scrooge himself.

The real issue in the Taib case is the legitimacy of the financial origins of his overseas business empire and whether he's involved, as alleged, money laundering. Patently, he has put his ill-gotten gains to work overseas to make even more money for him and his dynasty's politicking back home. This means studying conflict of interest issues, criminal breach of trust, abuse of power, and exercises in absolute power in Sarawak.

If we go there, the entire raison de etre of BN rule in Malaysia will come under public and international scrutiny.

At the heart of the matter, is that politics in Malaysia is not about issues but the need for the ruling elite to accumulate capital for two reasons.

Firstly, to ensure they can spawn a Bumiputera Commercial and Industrial Community to keep company with the Chinese; and, secondly, to fuel their politics and ensure political control of the country as long as possible, if not in perpetuity. The latter reason means twisting and turning every issue into a racial issue – think Perkasa, Ibrahim Ali and Mahathir -- in order to play to the gallery and ensure that the Malays in particular circle the wagons in unison against the other communities.

Mahathir himself admitted has much recently when he pointed out that "politics means that you need a lot of money", virtually justifying the corruption of the ruling elite. This was on the sidelines of why he isn't suing Barry Wain over the Malaysian Maverick.

Is there any better or faster way to accumulate capital than to raid the people's sweat from

the Public Treasury under the guise of development and white-wash the ill-gotten gains through money laundering?

Other people have other ways of accumulating quick and lots of capital like organised crime, trafficking in drugs, human trafficking, people smuggling, loan-sharking, wars, and in the old days, colonialism and slavery.

Given the fact that the MACC can't or won't act in the case of Taib, it's for civil society to commence class action suits against Taib's assets abroad.

It's best to allow the courts to act and get the support of the governments involved to freeze and bring back his assets to Sarawak as government revenue and/or distribution to the people, especially the victims of his administration.

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