

To survive, reformers must watch their backs

THREE days after my last column appeared (Walk the beat, department heads, or face the music, *Sunday Star*, Oct 23), the Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ) took action to uproot all the dead plants along Jalan Tujuan I was talking about. That's the kind of response we always appreciate and I would like to congratulate MPSJ.

In a functioning democracy, we only get what we deserve. Now, that is a statement worth pondering on. There's no use sitting on our rump and bemoaning our fate. We have to do something but, as is said in *The Tipping Point*, it should be "intelligent action".

In our local world of many sensitivities, we should bear them in mind even as we assert our rights, as assert we must. There will be somebody out there who will eventually see the light.

I don't suggest that all mayors and district officers should drive the length and breadth of their jurisdictions every day but two things they may want to consider.

One is to do just that, unheralded, every so often. It will give them the total picture whilst keeping their staff everywhere on their toes. The other is to map all projects, big and small, on an electronic or traditional area map, designate staff to track their progress and check the quality of materials and workmanship, and hold them accountable. If done consistently over the next several years, we will see the evolution and, finally, the entrenchment of a better work culture. Supervisors must supervise!

Here, I am reminded of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his famous little notebook. Everywhere he went he would write into the book all the imperfections he saw.

Why were two of the ornamental plants on the Jalan Parlimen road divider not symmetrical? Why was the 15th lamp-post askew? Why were the toilets at the airport so dirty? Why was the cistern in one toilet broken and not replaced?

He would throw these questions at one or other of the heads of department (HOD) attending his post-Cabinet meetings. No subject matter was below his dignity and few imperfections escaped his gaze. He once congratulated the KL Mayor for keeping the city streets clean but ticked him off for not realising that his workers had merely dumped the rubbish in the back lanes!

Of course, the local authorities did not monopolise all imperfections. Mahathir complained there were too many snatch thefts against tourists and police response time was slow. The police at the stations couldn't deal with the tourists as they didn't understand English. As a result, I formed the special "tourist police" unit to provide for English-speaking personnel to give focused attention to tourist security and welfare.

The Immigration, being a front-line service, took a lot of flak from Mahathir - mostly for an unfriendly and tourist-detering attitude and countenance. One of its directors-general then launched a Mesra Pelanggan campaign and made his officers all wear a "smile" badge but the campaign was not sustained. Hence, some staff are complying and have won plaudits for the department even in recent days, whereas others are not and have brought opprobrium on the department.

Many government departments have launched various campaigns but sustaining them has always been a problem. Usually they cease with the departure on retirement or transfer of their promoters. But campaigns that incur recurrent expenditure sometimes cease due to budgetary problems.

Talking about "supervisors must supervise" reminds me of 1969 when Tan Sri Ishak Tadin was



Tun Hussein Onn: A brave man who stood for integrity and for the law, and who triumphed overall his challenges.

seconded from the MCS (now Perkhidmatan Tadbir dan Diplomatik - PTD) to become CEO of Keretapi Tanah Melayu. I managed to tell him that his British predecessors had all started their day by walking the beat - touring the Sentul workshops. He did just that and, I supposed, found everybody working hard.

Then an insider told me that some of the workers were fooling the new boss who, being an outsider, did not know who the workers were, exactly where each of them was supposed to work, and on

what job. So, on the occasion of his first "walk", a number of workers were actually malingering but, on seeing him, grabbed any piece of material and pretended to be working away. He should have first consulted the duty details for the day. I promptly had the message relayed to Tan Sri Ishak!

Even years before that, there was a racket in the KTM workshop whereby one of the supervisors used to allow a number of his *anak mas* (favourite) workers to moonshine provided they pay him a dollar a day. Each of these workers would then pick up two or three part-time gardener's jobs at RM30 to RM40 per month per job and end up with at least RM60 net per month in addition to his full KTM salary.

One of these workers worked as my part-time gardener without revealing his KTM connection. The scam was busted by the Bukit Aman Special Crimes Unit - the forerunner of the ACA. Every HOD should be aware of this possibility that a number of his men could be moonshining. Therefore he should take stock of his human resources, particularly his field staff, every so often. When I was an OCPD and later, Chief Police Officer, I caught several of my detectives moonshining as bouncers!

Corrupt staff do not like the strict supervision imposed by their supervisors as it cuts down on their discretion and room to manoeuvre. According to the source of a reporter (Samsur Junet, *Utusan Malaysia*, Nov 2, 2005, p11), the travail of Datuk Bandar Ruslin Hassan of DBKL stemmed from his strict supervision on certain subordinates who had been used to getting away doing their own things in their own way under previous mayors who had been appointed from outside DBKL.

Ruslin, being an insider, knew what needed to be kept in check. And this had made some of the staff feel the unfamiliar heat which, having become unbearable, had led to a feeling of hatred and an impulse to exact revenge.

Reformers must watch their backs. The corrupt may try to hit back. At an AIM seminar on corruption and integrity held in Bali early this year, the Chairman of the Indonesian Commission on Corruption said the corrupt in Indonesia were powerful and were hitting back. Already one anti-corruption activist had been killed by poison whilst on a flight to Singapore and a pilot and steward were being held on suspicion. Jokingly, he said that his Commission members now carry their own mineral water on their flights.

Within days of my appointment as IGP on June 8, 1974, a reporter (James Ritchie of *New Straits Times*) asked me what my first priority was. In spite of the fact that the crime rate was alarmingly high and communist terrorist successes were palpable and had just led to the assassination of my predecessor, my answer was that corruption would be my priority - reason being that the fight against crime and the terrorists would be that much harder when some of my officers and men could be "bought and sold".

The corrupt who felt the heat from my newly established Disciplinary Unit which I placed directly under me desperately wanted to find my Achilles' heel. So, reformers beware!

Obviously, I was the subject of much-heated discussions. During one of these, a civilian staff asked, "What problem is so big that can't be solved with a bullet?" When he was identified. I resisted being emotional and asked the Disciplinary Branch to take his case up with the Deputy IGP. I would not deal with it as it involved me and to this day I do not know the outcome.

Tun Hussein Onn on assuming the office of Prime Minister in mid-January 1976 automatically assumed Tun Razak's burden of resisting strong pressure from Umno supporters of Datuk Harun Idris to withdraw Harun's corruption case from the judicial process.

Harun, the charismatic Selangor MB and President of Umno Youth, was easily the most adulated Malay leader at that time. Obviously, Hussein felt threatened by some emotional Harun supporters who wanted to confront him in his house.

"IGP, I am a Malay. Nobody assaults my house and get away with it." I told him not to worry as I would remain with him. He asked me to issue him with a hand-gun and I gave him my own but, to prevent anything untoward happening, I elected to be his gate-keeper and refused entry to the hot-heads, allowing in only the reasonable.

It was not an easy time for Hussein. For days, no Umno Minister or leader sided with him openly. The first to cast his support for the Prime Minister openly was his deputy, Mahathir. It was made in my presence to reporters at the Subang airport whilst waiting for Iraq's then Deputy President Saddam Hussein's plane to taxi-in.

Later in Parliament when he was asked whether there would be other arrests, Hussein called for patience, saying that the sea was full of big corrupt sharks. If he were to lose his balance and fall in, they would not hesitate to gobble him up.

In the following Umno elections, Harun's supporters put up a lightweight though well-known member, Hj Sulaiman Hj Ahmad aka Sulaiman Palestine, to contest against Hussein for the party presidency.

Although he lost as expected, he managed to put up a credible performance. His candidacy was only meant to embarrass Hussein. At the same time, Harun, contesting from prison, secured one of the vice-president posts, which was regarded to be another slap in the face for Hussein.

But, as we all know, the brave man who stood for integrity and for the law, triumphed over all his challenges. To him must be given the credit for the local survival of the legal principle that, "Be ye ever so high, the law is higher!"

• *Previous columns of Tun Hanifs Point of View are available at thestar.com.my/columnists/*