



by Charles Raj

IF RECENT events are anything to go by, then some local authorities and even state governments seem to be living in a world of their own.

Their indifference, arrogance, and, at times, sheer stupidity makes us wonder why and how such gross mismanagement is still being tolerated today. There have been increasing calls from ratepayers for honesty, efficiency and integrity from those entrusted with serving the *rakyat*.

It all boils down to the attitude of the senior officials at the helm of these errant local authorities. Is it really that difficult to carry out one's duty as directed by the Prime Minister to all those holding public office?

Despite numerous complaint letters to the Press, warnings by the Federal Government, criticism by irate ratepayers and even censure by the courts, it's business as usual for these authorities. Is it arrogance or sheer incompetence? Both perhaps.

Such dereliction of duty is becoming so rampant these days that ratepayers are, finding the antics of some local authorities pretty amusing, if not silly.

Earlier this year, this column highlighted several instances of malpractice by local authorities. Well, it is timely to look at more recent amusing antics of local authorities as reported in the Press. The more prominent ones during the last month include:

- The case where the Perlis state government failed to pay up but cried foul when Tenaga Nasional Bhd cut off electricity supply to most street lights in the state. For its efforts, the listed utility giant was branded uncaring. If that's not bad enough, Tenaga's President and Chief Executive Datuk Che Khalib Mohamad Noh actually apologised. Someone should tell him that it is actually the *Menteri Besar* who needs to apologise for the fiasco. Due to the state's inefficiency and *tidak apa* attitude in not settling the bills, the electricity supply was cut. An important point is being missed here.

Arrogance or Sheer Incompetence?

It would seem that some local authorities and state governments are turning from bad to worse where efficiency and competency are concerned. In all honesty, it's time they buck up or bail out.

Don't forget that Tenaga is a listed company answerable to minority and foreign institutional shareholders. Is this how we promote good corporate governance among government-linked companies (GLCs)?

- The case where the Kuala Selangor Municipal Council narrowly escaped having its headquarters sealed for failing to settle its debts to a legal firm. What's shocking is that the council had ignored dozens of warning letters and had even ignored a directive by the Federal Government to settle the amount. If that is not arrogance, then we don't know what is. Imagine the embarrassment, not to mention the undue expenses, incurred to ratepayers if the council office were to be sealed and its properties seized. Will those responsible be prepared to compensate ratepayers or continue with their flimsy excuses? Politicians should be made accountable for their actions.

- A parking scam that has been going on for two whole years at the Selayang wholesale market in Kuala Lumpur is another mind-boggling episode. It defies logic how a syndicate could actually collect parking fees right under the noses of KL City Hall officials. The syndicate members even had the gall to remove the signboards telling motorists that parking was free. One Press report stated that the syndicate

netted at least RM60,000 a month! This seems too obvious a case for the Anti-Corruption Agency to ignore.

- The interesting revelation by Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon that political interference was making his job of administering the state difficult. He hit out at critics who said the state government lacked political will in cleaning up the state. Perhaps, the newspapers that have taken it upon themselves to save Penang from decay and have stood up for the state, should investigate his allegations. It's a shame if the very politicians who hurl criticism suddenly shut up when their vested interests are at stake.

What do these four episodes show? We still have some way to go in inculcating a culture of honesty and a sense of responsibility among civil servants and even politicians.

Are they just too preoccupied with other activities to know what is going on in their own departments and councils? We hope not.

Do not blame the past either. The fact remains that once you take over the job, you must be prepared to quickly solve problems and iron out issues. If you can't, then just call it quits.

Ratepayers want efficient and good service. **mb**