

## **COMMENT: Rakyat must pass the acid test of integrity**

Sulaiman Mahbob  
January 21, 2006  
New Straits Times

Jan 21: THERE is a saying that "uneasy lies the head that wears the crown". This is true. Discharging our responsibility to our constituencies is no easy thing.

There may be high expectations and many challenges that leaders have to meet to carry out their obligations. Along the way there are pitfalls and temptations.

With leadership position comes a social responsibility. Social expectations are even more demanding. Leaders are expected to act on the electorate's behalf on all matters, not knowing that they are elected to be legislators first at the state or national level.

However, our political leaders have willingly played the roles expected of them by society.

The electorate must know that they have also to change and practise good values to make the work and performance of representatives easier.

The National Integrity Plan has made recommendations to strengthen political institutions and improve the role of elected representatives. The focus on institutions covers the need to strengthen Parliament and the election process, the role of the Election Commission, as well as the role and ethics of representatives.

The aim is to boost the democratic process and institutions, thus bringing about an effective parliamentary democracy.

One concern of the plan is to create a political culture that is mature, healthy and democratic.

This covers the need for programmes to boost awareness among would-be representatives of the dangers of corruption and related political offences, and to ensure the corrupt do not get elected by making the criteria of being clean, efficient and trustworthy the basis of nomination.

It is also suggested that a committee on integrity be established for every political party to impart to its members the ingredients of political integrity.

The plan also calls for efforts to ensure that the values of being clean, efficient, committed, trustworthy and dedicated are central to those aspiring to be political leaders.

These expectations are no tall order. They can be inspired, imbued and achieved.

The values of incorruptibility, honesty and trustworthiness are more important than they were before, with rising incomes and materialism. The suggestions made in the plan, however, should not be interpreted as questioning the credibility of political leaders.

Malaysia is never short of people and leaders of integrity, without whom we would never have reached where we are now nor remain united and harmonious amid our differences.

Malaysia as a society has successfully managed its ethnic relations, thanks to our political leaders, who are level-headed and far sighted.

The destiny and life of the people are more important than narrow political differences and parochialism. To be sure we should not be expecting only our political leaders to be subjected to integrity-boosting exercises.

The rakyat and community and business leaders should emulate good conduct, such as being clean, trustworthy, ethical and dedicated to a good work and business culture. In other words, the whole community has to absorb and practise these values for the benefit of the nation.

To advance in the area of political integrity, a Parliamentary Select Committee consisting of representatives from various political parties has been appointed to chart the programmes related to boosting integrity.

The committee will consult political leaders and the rakyat on how to boost integrity in the country, not only on the conduct of political leadership but also on how to strengthen the political and democratic process and institutions.

This initiative will help the Government and the authorities related to political processes, such as Parliament and the Election Commission, create a healthy environment and culture that boost the nation's stature as a democratic country.

The machinery for boosting integrity is not only confined to the above committee.

The Prime Minister chairs a Special Cabinet Committee on Integrity in Administration which deliberates on issues that have a bearing on corruption and integrity, such as public complaints and delays in public delivery services.

To complement this measure, there is also within each ministry a committee headed by the minister concerned with reducing red tape.

Thus, the administrative and political environment for reducing corruption and boosting integrity is in place.

What is needed is change in individuals.

The laws can be enacted, the institutions can be set up, the procedures can be minimised, but ultimately the people must be more honest, disciplined, ethical, and moral.

This is the acid test of integrity. Otherwise, we will have people who are just compliant but not "converted" to the values the laws and public initiatives espouse.

\* Datuk Sulaiman Mahbob heads the Malaysian Institute of Integrity

Source:

[http://www.nst.com.my/Current\\_News/nst/Saturday/Columns/20060121081114/Article/index\\_html](http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/nst/Saturday/Columns/20060121081114/Article/index_html)