

The i-word that packs a wallop

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Q: What is integrity?

A: Doing the right thing, with honour, ethical principles, even when nobody is looking.

At night, when the traffic light is red, there's no policeman, and when nobody's looking, you say: "It's okay if I break the law" — that's not integrity.

Integrity is doing things in an ethical manner, with accepted values and trustworthiness.

Q: How do you teach or inculcate integrity?

A: We have to start early. It is said that the first four or five years of a child's life is the best time to inculcate the basics of ethics, behaviour, proper manners, proper principles in them.

We always reflect on what our parents would do, then we'd do likewise. So, integrity is the same thing.

If parents themselves do not show good examples by doing the right thing in front of the children, then how do they expect children to do the right or moral thing as they grow up?

The way we respect our elders, or drive — with our children watching how we behave — that sets the children's idea of integrity.

Q: What happens if there is no integrity?

A: The breakdown of integrity will lead to so many other things: Abuse of power, corruption and, if you are a young person, immoral acts.

Q: Isn't abuse of power corruption, too?

A: Yes. Corruption is not only when you receive money or give money illegally to make something happen.

For example, if I have some jobs in IIM, and I give it to my brother or sister or my children who have a company to clean this building, then that is corruption.

A person with integrity will say to the family: "Get a job somewhere else, or work somewhere else, because you will compromise my position." That is integrity.

There are hundreds of places where they can go, so why don't they go somewhere else?

But integrity is not only about corruption. I think that's very clear.

Non-integrity — where you do not obey the law, you do not respect other people's rights, you think just because you have money you can do whatever you want — this will lead to corruption or corrupt practices.

Q: On the government's an-

Integrity is a word much bandied about these days. Integrity in construction of buildings, integrity in court trials, integrity in everyday life. The National Integrity Perception Index survey, which will measure Malaysians' perception of integrity in the country, will start soon with a random knock on the door. ANIZA DAMIS speaks to Integrity Institute of Malaysia (IIM) president Datuk Dr Mohd Tap Salleh on the essence of integrity



nouncement about the civil service pay rise, what do you think of this perception that the more you pay people, the less corrupt they will be?

A: The first thing is this; corruption is done not only by people with low income.

There are many more people who are corrupt and have a lot more money than you can think of.

They are millionaires, but they are still corrupt.

Secondly, when statements are made which say that as a result of the pay increase there shouldn't be any more corruption, my view is that it is not implying that it is all right for you to be corrupt or to abuse your position just because you are being paid very low.

Q: But the prime minister said there was no excuse for people to be corrupt anymore...

A: When the prime minister says you have to be more efficient and there has to be better delivery, it is because the expectation is that once you pay more — if before the people were able to produce 100 per cent — now the people are expected to produce 110 per cent.

That's the principle upon which that statement was made.

Q: Who should teach a country integrity? Should it be leaders? Should it be followers?

A: I was brought up by my parents. Even though they were not in the right, I would never say that they were wrong. That's how we were brought up. Probably we would say it in so many other ways, but not directly.

But I have a son, who is 25 now, and he speaks his mind. And if there are some things that he doesn't agree with, he will tell me. This is the way that it should be done.

If somebody is doing something wrong, then you have to tell them, nicely, diplomatically, that it is not the right way to do things.

We, as individuals, are leaders in the family, community, environment.

In an office, you might not be a leader in your organisation, but you might be a leader in your unit. So, that in itself holds a high responsibility.

Whatever the leader does, those below will follow.

But if the leader is doing something wrong, we shouldn't, as Malays say, *ikut membabi-but* (follow blindly).

I do not see that just because the boss wants things to be done the wrong way, we should do it. We should advise him. That is our responsibility.

NATIONAL INTEGRITY PERCEPTION INDEX — To reflect our perception of ourselves

The findings of the National Integrity Perception Index survey, which will be tabulated early next year, will tell Malaysians how they view themselves.

Will the perception be that integrity in Malaysia is healthy or

unhealthy? What will the verdict be?

The survey, to be conducted from August to October, will involve 20,000 respondents from households, civil service, economic establishments and

non-governmental organisations.

"This perception index is aimed at getting the right feeling of what the country thinks of itself," says Integrity Institute of Malaysia (IIM) president Datuk Dr Mohd Tap Salleh.

"This won't be an American or British or any other foreign survey. We want to look at ourselves from our point of view."

The findings of the survey will be used by the government to develop policies, and, because it

will be held annually, it will be possible to gauge changes in perception and whether the solutions and activities implemented are effective.

The survey will have six perception indices:

1 Corruption

This index will look at whether people think the laws and enforcement are adequate. It will also look at how Malaysians perceive corruption, as well as their definition of corruption.

"Corruption as a definition is very difficult," says Mohd Tap.

"Corruption is a composite of action which contributes to misuse of power, sourcing money illegally for a deed to be done."

If the survey finds that people don't understand what constitutes corruption, then steps will be taken to ensure that they do.

"There are some who say that abusing your position for personal gain is not corruption. For example, giving a contract to your friend is not corruption.

"Others believe that giving (a bribe) is not wrong.

"This is not true. The giver and the taker are both in the wrong."

If the finding is that people think it is all right to give, then the government will have to address the issue.

Laws might need to be changed.

2 Quality of public service delivery system

Perception has an effect on morale.

"If the perception is that public servants are very corrupt but you are an honest public servant, then this perception will affect you," says Mohd Tap.

This index will look at how people perceive waiting time or response time from the public service. In addition to getting the opinions of the public, it will also look at the public servant as a user of public service. It will ask public servants their views of their colleagues' delivery system, as well as whether they consider themselves honest in whatever they do in terms of delivery of service.

3 Business ethics and social responsibility

In business, perception is more important than reality, says Mohd Tap.

"When we talk about corruption in Malaysia, what foreign direct investors perceive (about our level of corruption) will affect their decision to invest in the country.

"If corruption is rife in business, then whatever cost that is incurred will come down to us, because the businesses will transfer the extra cost on to the customers.

"But if, from the outset, it is perceived that Malaysia is corrupt, then businesses will not come in and new jobs will not be created."

5 Quality of life and social well being

This index will look at whether people are happy with the community, the environment, their financial position as well as whether they are satisfied with basic issues such as rubbish collection and drainage system.

6 Courtesy

This index, which will be conducted together with the Ministry of Arts and Culture, will gauge the issue of manners. It will ask questions like: "How do you behave towards your parents?" and "Does your upbringing have an effect on how you behave?"

4 Strength of family and community

This index will create a composite of what Malaysian families are like.

Among others, this index will look at how people take care of their families, the frequency of family activities, and whether parents set deadlines when their children are supposed to come home at night.

It will also look at the frequency that families have meals together.

"The family as a unit is the biggest enforcer of integrity. When you sit down to meals together, this is when you can impose your values."

If the index finds that quality time with the family is affected, then there might be a need to "insist that government agencies and the private sector make sure that workers do not work on Saturdays and Sundays so that they have some quality time for the family".

But some people do not even want to suggest, because they want to be seen as doing whatever the boss says.

I think a lot of people survive without having to say "Yes" all the time. But you have to be diplomatic, and you have to give alternatives.

To me, it's whether that person has got principles. But some people are afraid to voice their opinions.

Q: Ceiling collapses and leaks and floods in newly-built government buildings — how does that reflect on the concept of integrity?

A: It is basically a lack of integrity.

When you start to compromise on quality because you want to make more profit, that is when integrity is also compromised. And there is no excuse for that.

Not only should the contractor be blacklisted, but I think they should not be given any other jobs.

Not the company, but the individual. The company keeps changing its name, so the individual should be blacklisted.

If you blacklist the company, they can very easily change their name — re-register as another company.

And, if they are professionals,



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*Datuk Dr Mohd Tap Salleh,
president, Integrity Institute
of Malaysia*

they should be de-barred by the professional body.

Q: What did you think of the Attorney-General's changing of the prosecution team in the Altantuya murder trial?

A: That's an act of integrity.

As the A-G said, if having had knowledge of that (the prosecuting officer playing badminton with the judge) and not taking any action, then at the end of the trial, the aggrieved party could easily have used this (fraternising) as an excuse.

The judicial and legal service

has very strict rules. And this was a pertinent issue.

This is a high-profile case. Everyone is looking at the integrity of the trial, the judge, the prosecution.

To me, if there is any doubt in terms of the integrity (of the trial), then it is better to err on the side of caution. I fully support his decision. It was the right decision.

Q: How important is accountability and transparency for integrity?

A: It is very critical. If you are not accountable, then it is very dif-

icult for you to make a decision with integrity. Accountability is the basis of integrity.

If you are not accountable, you don't have to have integrity, isn't it? You just do things — you don't have to justify why you do certain things.

Q: But you said that integrity is something that you practise even when no one is watching.

A: For public servants, or if you are doing things for the public, you have to be accountable, because the public has the right to ask why you made this decision.

You might say: "I don't have to justify anything because I am a man of integrity", but at the end of the day, that person might be investing money in the company and wants to see where it went.

If you have conducted yourself with integrity, then you have no problems being accountable.

Q: And in order to prove your accountability, you have to be transparent?

A: Yes. It's a lot easier for you. Basically, you must make the right decision; but you must also be seen to make the right decision. That's when transparency comes in.

I make the decision to promote somebody — my decision is based on many things, the grade, the performance, etc. But if other people do not know why I made that decision, then I am not transparent.

If you look at judgments in the courts, you cannot get any more transparent than that. Because if you are a judge, then you have to write your judgment according to what you think is best.

People will know whether you have been paid off, whether you have certain baggage, whether you don't have integrity — because it is open.

There's nothing more transparent than that.