



May the Force be with Us

As Tan Sri Musa Hassan takes over the reins from his predecessor Tan Sri Mohd Bakri Omar as Chief of Police, there is only one thing to do: enhance the integrity of the force and make law and order a way of life for all Malaysians.

THE NEW INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF POLICE, TAN SRI MUSA HASSAN, can be forgiven for showing strong emotion at the handover ceremony in Kuala Lumpur on Sept 8. He is taking over the service during a difficult period in the history of law enforcement in our country from highly respected predecessor, Tan Sri Mohd Bakri Omar.

Musa broke down while paying tribute to Mohd Bakri, whom he described as an exceptional and respected leader.

Having had the opportunity to know these two men better during the sitting of the Royal Commission to Enhance the Operations and Management of the Royal Malaysian Police in 2004 and 2005, I think I understand Musa's sentiment.

He was not exaggerating when he said that Mohd Bakri had overcome obstacles and withstood the onslaught by certain quarters and the media throughout his tenure as IGP.

The two men collaborated meaningfully with the commission, juggling two opposing needs — protecting the image and the morale of the 93,000-strong force and assuring the public that their lives and properties were protected.

It was a well-documented fact that Mohd Bakri faced stiff challenge to his authority from some key officers of the service who were used to 'the old way', and from criminal elements that were in cahoots with wayward officers at all levels.

Mohd Bakri's biggest headache, as repeatedly told to the commission, was rebuilding the top hierarchy of the service, instilling discipline and overcoming the abuse of power by service members, and not to mention grappling with inadequate equipment and facilities.

The commission submitted its report to the Government in

May last year. On the physical side, it is understood that the commission's 125 recommendations are being steadily implemented.

I was recently told by the commission's secretary, Datuk Hamzah Mat Rus, who is overseeing the implementation of the report, that such equipment and facilities as patrol cars, office and communication equipment, office buildings and staff quarters are being progressively put in place.

At the operational level, however, such glitches as the lack of sufficiently skilled drivers and, sometimes, insufficient fuel supply, are keeping the patrol cars in police compounds rather than patrolling the streets. These operational problems, says Hamzah, are being tackled.

But for members of the public, what puts the service and the Government in the spotlight is the lack of progress in the formation of the Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC).

The IPCMC was the centrepiece of the commission's findings and recommendations. It was intended to be the long-term solution to making the service more accountable and people-friendly. Nearly eight months after the submission of the report, the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, publicly announced that the Government would set up the IPCMC.

It was largely prompted by allegations that a female Chinese national had been ordered to strip in the Petaling Jaya police lock-up and was illegally videotaped.

The incident saw the Government hurriedly dispatching a minister to Beijing 'to apologise' without waiting for the outcome of an investigation by a special task force headed by former Lord

President Tun Mohamed Dzaiddin Abdullah, who was also chairman of the Royal Commission.

As it turned out, the stripping and videotaping 'victim' was not a Chinese national. She was not even Chinese. She was a Malay housewife who has since filed a suit against the Government and the police, and is seeking RM10 million in compensation.

Abdullah's announcement, as has been widely reported, was greeted with open objection by the police and a section of Umno Members of Parliament. But after several months of discussions and a series of meetings, including with Abdullah and the Attorney-General's Chambers, the police ended their objection.

It would seem that the police are accepting the formation of the independent commission on the basis that they too should be allowed to file complaints and are given immunity against prosecution should they decide to blow the whistle on politicians for interfering in their investigations.

Despite the Royal Commission having drafted a Bill to be presented to Parliament to form the IPCMC, the Attorney-General's Chambers is still looking at the proposed legislation. It is understood that one of the sticky points is whether to confine the IPCMC to the police or to expand it to cover other law-enforcement agencies as well.

The commission's Bill was drafted by some of the best legal minds in the country, including two former Lord Presidents – Mohamed Dzaiddin and Tun Mohd Salleh Abas – the former long-serving IGP Tun Mohammed Hanif Omar, and High Court Judge Datin Paduka Zaleha Zahari and three lawyers: Tan Sri Zaki Tun Azmi, Datuk Kamilia Ibrahim and Kuthubul Zaman Bukhari, the former Bar Council President.

It would serve the Government and the police well for Musa to do whatever he can to hasten the formation of the IPCMC. The longer the issue is kept hanging, the worse it becomes for the Government and the police.

Given the worsening law and order situation in the country, any further delay in setting up the IPCMC and equipping the police with better equipment and greater moral authority will make the task of assuring the people that their lives and properties are well guarded that much more difficult.

The Umno-controlled *New Straits Times* in a front-page report on Sept 8 said: 'Musa faces a challenging task as the crime rate is up and police morale (is) low. His priority will be to reduce one and boost the other.' The paper said that while the overall crime index had risen by 13.19%, violent crimes had increased by 23.79%.

This cannot be good news for the police and it is certainly worse for the Government and the people. The Government, with its massive electoral mandate, cannot fail in its promise of a better life for the people.

But in as far as law and order is concerned, the statistics of recent months do not suggest that they are living in a safer environment. On the contrary, as highlighted by media reports, their lives and properties are at risk.

Simple snatch thefts and roadside robberies are leading to deaths and serious injuries. Unless there is clear indication that public safety can be improved and guaranteed, the Government should not be overly enthusiastic about promoting such events and programmes as 'Visit Malaysia Year 2007' and encouraging more foreigners to study in our country.

It is international protocol that when a foreigner visits our country, we are responsible for his or her safety and security. Given the current situation, I am inclined to believe that for the sake of our image and long-term interest, we should be truthful with visitors to our country about the prevailing law and order situation.

Fortunately, we are not without resources to ensure greater safety and security for our people and for visitors to our country. What we lack is planning, implementation and monitoring.

It is good that the Government is deploying Rela and reactivating the *Rukun Tetangga*. But we can also use elements of the National Service, police and military recruits and even school- and university-based units to be our eyes and ears in the fight against crime.

But our inherent weakness is the lack of will-power and ability to continue with our policies and programmes once the very situation for which they were instituted has improved.

Let us hope that Musa, with the help of his rank and file, will be able to make law and order truly a Malaysian way of life. For that, he needs a police service that is professional, clean and respected. **mb**

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