

# Graft, alive and (un) well

## Corruption simply won't go away

GOVERNMENT employees' corruption, which has beset the country since Merdeka, is alive and (un) well, as ruefully observed by the prime minister, who vowed, again, to quell the jobbery. Bribery, kickbacks, nepotism, shady deals and creative free contracts, the *rasuah* simply won't go away, the official lament goes. Over time, the profiteering is described in benign terms: coffee and under the table money, my children's education, duit raya, *ikhlas* and so forth. The war on corruption? Measures were designed to suppress temptation, internal investigations, law enforcement probes, religious counselling, team-building indoctrination, school instruction and finally, invoking the fear of God? Nothing!

Our so-called trustees, from top to bottom, simply dipped into the public kitty, multiplied now as buy-offs commensurate with budget or project appropriations against inflation. Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim vowed to scrub the small numbers who "stubbornly solicit and accept bribes" Verily, he must magnify hugely his revelation. Employees referred to by the prime minister are "small fry" Though in reality, nothing moves without the nod from heads of agencies, departments and ministries. Look, corruption is a slithering snake pit in every government's dark under-

belly, no matter how "clean" they project themselves to be. How did bribery originate in our civil service? Observe the foodchain of the bosses, their big bosses and their bigger bosses. As an inflection point, look no further than the British colonialists' arrival centuries ago to "protect and preserve" Tanah Melayu. Seemingly, the British weren't "corruptible": they didn't need to because they commanded powers so absolute that they plundered whatever they wanted land, primary and natural resources, minerals, spices, and even our subservience, notwithstanding rebels like Mat Kilau. The only funds the British paid were "gifts" and "fees" to the then powers-that-be who "controlled" ownership. To the British, it's the cost of doing business, not bribes because every guinea, shilling and pence disbursed was officially accounted, balanced and ledgered. Recipients simply luxuriated themselves with little thought of spreading the wealth to the working class. Transpose that to the present-day payolas, civil servants discerned with envy and disgust at how the bosses tabulated pay-outs from lavish kickbacks one for you, nine for me. High-powered indictments, convictions and imprisonments couldn't soft pedal the racket. The inkling in pliant government employees? "If politicians can skim millions, hundreds of millions, even billions from the top and get away with it, why can't we?"

An inspired and innovative attempt to temper corruption is not to reinforce punitive measures, counselling or invoking God's name. The seduction of bilking and milking public funds is akin to an incorrigible drug addiction. So, why not emulate techniques of Pemadam, or Alcoholic or Gambling Anonymous? Yes, Corruption Anonymous sounds terribly holistic, until the attempt may grind to a halt before it even starts.

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