

Changing shades of Transparency International bad for Malaysia
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Perception is everything and the presence of officials from government agencies Pemandu and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) at a Transparency International press conference yesterday set tongues wagging and drew the ire of a veteran anti-graft crusader.

Outgoing TI-M secretary-general Josie Fernandez said that the independence of any non-governmental organisation was important.

"Once independence is compromised, we lose the citizens' voice against corruption... what was the NKRA, Pemandu and MACC doing here? Is this an NGO press conference or government press conference," she said after TI-M released its latest survey on corruption.

In addition to the press corps, Datuk Nordin Hashim, a director at NKRA, Ravindran Devagunam, a director from the government's performance management delivery unit and several communications officers from MACC were present at the press conference – a rarity even in Malaysia where there is often a symbiotic relationship between NGOs and government agencies.

The Malaysian chapter of TI has been in turmoil since its former head, Datuk Paul Low left in May to become a senator and a member of Prime Minister Najib Razak's Cabinet.

He was replaced by Datuk Akhbar Satar, a former MACC officer while Prof Datuk Mohamad Ali Hasan and Lio Kheng Min were appointed as deputy president and secretary-general respectively.

Fernandez disagreed with the manner in which the current leadership was chosen, noting that the selection was done by eight exco members.

The last annual general meeting ended in turmoil with Fernandez being asked to leave after disagreeing with the manner the current leadership was chosen.

"The decision on leadership should not be left to a few people. All the members should be involved in the voting process. That was how it has been previously," she told The Malaysian Insider.

"When you can't manage leadership in an organisation, how can we manage the fight against corruption?"

"Because of Paul's sudden appointment and unexpected departure, there's a vacuum. He should have set the next line of leadership. There should have been discussions on this."

The tussle for the secretary-general's position will be decided on July 20 at an extra-ordinary general meeting. But of more immediate concern is whether TI-M remains a non-partisan body, or whether it has become an establishment body.

Not helping matters for the watchdog body is the criticisms being leveled against Low as a minister and to a lesser extent, his replacement at TI-M.

Since being appointed minister in charge of integrity, good governance and human rights, Low has been attacked by DAP's Tony Pua and other critics as an apologist for the administration.

He did not do himself any favours last night when reacting to the survey results that showed that the public's confidence in the government's anti-corruption effort had dropped sharply in 2012. Low said that corruption is a global menace and not unique to Malaysia.

The latest poll also showed that the police and political parties were perceived to be the two most corrupt institutions in Malaysia.

Low's reply: "The Malaysian finding is consistent with the worldwide results where 36 countries viewed the police as the most corrupt...."

These answers are in sharp contrast to his statements when commenting on graft surveys in his capacity as TI-M president.

Then, he pointed out that the MACC and other reforms introduced by the government were ineffective in fighting corruption.

In 2009, he noted that until drastic action is taken to separate the cozy relationship between government, business and politics, the anti-corruption effort will be no more than a token gesture.

Earlier during the press conference yesterday, Akhbar soft-pedalled a finding that an increasing number of Malaysians believed that corruption increased last year compared with 2011. "This is just public perception," said the former MACC official.

The schism within TI-M was played out yesterday in the full view of the press. As Fernandez was speaking to reporters after the press conference, exco member Major Rozni Hashim yelled at her, saying she had no right to speak to the media as she was no longer the secretary-general.

"As far as we are concerned, the legitimate secretary-general is KM Loi (Loi Kheng Min). That is what the president and exco have sanctioned, let's not make it worse for TI-M," said Rozni.

"This is a TI-M function for the 'Global Corruption Barometer'. I am embarrassed to hear Josie doing this."

Fernandez was offering her views on the results of the survey, elaborating on the public's continued belief that the country is still afflicted with high levels of corruption.

Hisham was adamant that she stop offering her views.

"You're listening to the wrong person. Where is KM Loi," Hisham shouted again before leading the media to Akhbar and Loi.

Fernandez was also asked if TI-M would lose its credibility now that the organisation is in turmoil.

"We have done some progressive work but we need the right people to do the work now.

Non-partisan people," she added. - July 10, 2013.

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