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Resolve to live with integrity

NATIONAL CHARACTER: A nation that has integrity, where citizens respect each other, is a strong nation at all times

EVERY day in the media, in talk shows and fora, the citizenry is reminded to abide by moral values. As the matter of corruption was realised from Independence, an anti-corruption unit was set up in the Prime Minister's Department in 1959.

In 1973, the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) changed its name to the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) as a fully-fledged department under the Home Ministry.

NBI was renamed ACA in 1982. In mid-April 1982, the government launched the clean, efficient, and trustworthy campaign.

The government had also discouraged civil servants from accepting any hampers or other gifts from the public.

In 2008, the government established the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), and replaced the ACA Act 1982 with the MACC Act 2009.

MACC claims to be independent, professional, and transparent. Realising the power of human greed and wealth seeking instincts, MACC set up five boards to ensure checks and balances.

The boards are, namely, Independent Oversight Board, Anti-Corruption Advisory Board, Special Committee on Corruption, Complaints Committee, Operations Review Panel, Consultation, and Corruption Prevention Panel.

In addition to MACC, the government has decided to establish integrity units in all ministerial and government departments at the federal and state levels. There are now agencies which have their own certified integrity officers to facilitate the integrity management aspect.

The problems of corruption and unethical behaviour have stayed in society over the years, as is also the case with other developed and developing nations.

Appeals are made to the citizenry to avoid corruption with arguments based on morality wherein corruption is regarded as an evil.

The power of social pressure is used by arguing that people do not want to support their family and "the blood which flows through their families" by money and resources corruptly gained.

The argument of self-respect and loyalty to the country is also used, particularly, by making comparison with the Japanese culture of not shaming the country.

In the 1990s, civil servants were trained to uphold the integrity of the civil service with high moral principles and universal humanistic values of service leadership.

Examples of the values are trustworthiness, clean conduct, dutiful, exemplary leadership, patience, and the

joy of innovation. The values are all interrelated, reinforcing and in a systemic web of mutual significance.

Much has been written and taught about values-based management and living values. Who then in society are corrupt or of corrupting influence?

Conventional public knowledge suggests that they are those who seek wealth and power by any means and those who live beyond their means.

They are not just those who serve in high risk departments that provide opportunities for abuse, but also from those departments where decision-makers gain when they make decisions in favour of preferred parties.

In manifestos for the 13th General Election, political parties promised transparency and a clean government. Ideas, champions and institutions are necessary to combat the various forms of corruption.

Corrupt habits are nipped in the bud by stopping people from receiving gifts, especially during the festive seasons.

Media Prima Bhd and other companies have decided to stop the practice of accepting festive gifts, to avoid conflicts of interest and elements of abuse of power among staff, in dealing with vendors or business partners.

The policy is expected to reinforce the corporate core values of integrity, respect, care, transparency, good governance, and trustworthiness.

The National Integrity Plan formulated in 2004 together with the establishment of the Integrity Institute of Malaysia (IIM) is a significant development towards improving awareness, commitment, and participation of citizens in enhancing a national character of ethics and integrity, strengthening the family institution, improving corporate governance and business ethics, and raising the quality of life and wellbeing of society.

During the short span of its existence, IIM has conducted valuable research, generated and disseminated materials to significant stakeholders in society.

As Malaysia reviews and reformulates its National Social Policy which was conceptualised and implemented from 2003, the concept of "Integrity" must become the practical pillar for social policy.

A nation that has integrity is a strong nation in times of peace and war. It is a nation where the citizens respect each other because social and relationship capital is strong.

National character with strong integrity and ethics will ensure honour, sustainable wellbeing, and collective trust. Any day, any time is a good time to resolve to live with integrity.

Those who have erred can forgive themselves and resolve that "from this day on", they will turn over a new leaf.

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