



Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute  
Dedicated To Creating A Better Society

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THE National Anti-Corruption Plan (2019-2023) is highly commendable and should be hailed by all honest Malaysians. The government and all those who formulated this comprehensive plan deserve our appreciation.

But the proof of the pudding is in the eating. There is much concern, if not doubt, as to whether we can achieve the goal of a corruption-free Malaysia in just five years.

The latest Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) showed very slight improvement in our corruption score for last year. This period includes Pakatan Harapan's rule of about eight months since last May. We've moved from a ranking of 62 to 61 out of 180 countries from 2017 to 2018. At the same time, our score remained stuck at 47 points out of 100 for 2017 and 2018.

What does this low score mean? It indicates that Malaysia's CPI will improve only when all of our efforts to fight corruption and bring to book corrupt leaders bear fruit. That is to say, all those guilty of corruption, especially in high places, should be made to pay for swindling the rakyat.

What are the challenges facing us as we strive to become a corrupt-free nation in just five years?

As Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has rightly stated many times, corruption has developed into a kind of culture in Malaysia over the years.

When I was president of Transparency International Malaysia, I observed some reasons for this bad culture of corruption, and these include the following.

1. Developing from a feudal society in the past, we often carried on with the tradition of

rewarding those who provide us with good service. For instance, the helpful civil servant was given chickens, muruku or ang pow, especially during festivals, for doing his job well. Of course, today the chickens have been replaced by money under the concept of cash is king.

2. There are many who perceive that corruption is acceptable as it contributes to improving the distribution of income. The view held by many is "You give me and I'll give you, so what is wrong?" Some believe that we need to share our wealth, as in "Let's share lah. You *untung dan saya mesti untung juga* (you profit and so must I)."

3. Grand corruption occurs mainly in money politics, however, and this is where the NACP has come out with bold proposals to control it and to set limits on political funding. The NACP will set these limits in two years but I am sure it can be done sooner. After all, there are precedents on fixing limits for political funding from all over the world. We could just set some criteria for the essential campaign costs. It's not difficult to calculate the cost of campaign banners, pamphlets, transport and travelling for each candidate.

4. The public and civil services were more multi-racial in the past and corruption before the 1970s was far less. But there is a tendency to have less checks and balances when the public service is mono-racial, as one may feel reluctant to report one's own kind, so to speak. The NACP should push for a more multi-racial public service to encourage

competition to be free of corruption.

5. Most importantly, the top leaders in the government and the secretaries-general and heads of departments must set the best examples for integrity and corruption-free conduct. Otherwise, as a police constable once asked me: "Why can't you give me only RM50 for not writing a traffic summons when the big shots get away with RM50mil and more?" He was logical but not morally right. However, when I insisted on being handed my summons, he let me off with a mild warning.

What more could the NACP do?

1. It has to work closely with the government to raise efficiency and reduce red tape. The public offer bribes mostly to prevent delays in obtaining approvals for, among others, licences, permits, contracts and land alienation for property development or cultivation. If the efficiency in government administration is improved further, I believe the opportunities to demand for and pay bribes will be reduced considerably.

2. It should also seek to reduce the size of the government. The huge public service (comprising about 1.6 million civil servants) is due to the wide range of government services it undertakes. Why not find ways of allowing the private sector to undertake some of these government services? Basic needs like education, health and housing, for example, could be prioritised for the B40 group while the rich could be encouraged to pay more for these

services or go to the business sector. This would reduce the burden on the government and size of the civil service.

3. All religious leaders could preach more fervently against corruption. If corruption is depicted as a despicable sin, I am sure it will be very effective in stopping people from being corrupt.

4. The NACP should adopt the principle of presumption of guilt until proven innocent. This principle is practised in some countries to much advantage. Perhaps a study could be undertaken on its merits and practicality. Thus, someone holding a sensitive official position with a low income but has 10 houses could be presumed to be guilty of corruption and he would have to prove his innocence. Perhaps he could show that he inherited his wealth, but if his parents are also poor, he would have some explaining to do.

5. The government has to ensure that there are trusted systems to monitor the progress of the NACP's sound 22 strategies and 115 initiatives. It may be useful to provide the public with half-yearly reports to show the progress made under the NACP to achieve the goals and targets.

Some of these proposals could help to attain the NACP's worthy goals. But, as our Prime Minister has firmly stated, we must all work together to achieve them.

Let that be our new year resolution.

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