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The fence that eats the rice

POINT OF VIEW

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The police force and the Anti-Corruption Agency – two crucial institutions leading the fight against malpractices and corruption. Yet they are sadly disappointing in their inability to even clean up their own backyards.

TWO once greatly respected institutions have continued to remain notorious, using the word in its plain meaning but over the past 10 years for the wrong reasons.

The first we all know because among the first things that this government did after the last general election was to convene a Royal Commission from February 2004 to enquire why that institution had gone so far down the road of self-destruct and to make recommendations as to how to enhance again its operations and management. That was our Polis Diraja Malaysia (PDRM).

The Royal Commission Report was released in April 2005. Numerous recommendations were made but it was the setting up of the Independent Police Commission Against Malpractices and Corruption (IPCMC) that was felt to be cardinal to the whole effort. It was strongly felt that the rot within the PDRM was so deep-seated that an independent, extrinsic monitoring authority was needed to help the IGP and the Police Force Commission steer back the force to the straight and narrow.

I briefed the Royal Commission that police corruption was so extensive that a very senior ACA officer had confided in me and another top retired police officer that 40% of the senior officers could be arrested without further investigations – strictly on the basis of their lifestyles. One state police chief had a net worth of RM18mil. My friend and I had watched the force getting deeper and deeper into the morass of corruption.

It was the daily talk and the butt of gibes on the golf courses that embarrassed retired police officers no end; yet even we were stunned by this revelation and its implication. Would the force we had served for so long and which had given us so much experience and such great pride for what we had built it into, be destroyed in the expected ACA action?

I could not help telling the ACA officer that he really had his work cut out for him and that his fight against corruption was the most important fight facing the country but I hoped that he could effectively stamp out this corruption without destroying our PDRM which had done such yeomen service to the nation.

The Royal Commission Report was made public two-and-a quarter years ago, yet PDRM has still not burnished its image. It is still mired in controversy. Need I say why? It is so clearly divided into at least two groups at the top and, consequently, affects the officers below. That is why one group carries out arrests of alleged crime kingpins and the other group and the ACA have allegedly interrogated the arresting officers in the belief that the first group is eliminating the informants of the other group.

Whom can we believe when one group is headed by the IGP and the other by a police director backed by the Deputy Minister of Internal Security? They are at opposite poles. Both the IGP and the Deputy Minister of Internal Security

have allegations of corruption thrown at them but both have been investigated by the ACA, the content of the reports to the AG we do not know. What we know is that the AG has absolved both of them. So, between the two, whom are we to believe?

That is why the IPCMC is so important – so that we have an instrument to get to the truth. By not letting the IPCMC see the light of day after such a long study by the AG speaks volumes of the AG's understanding of the seriousness of the problem and its effect on the criminal justice system. The AG himself has lost his credibility for this recalcitrance and for his “defeats” in recent high profile cases as well as for some high profile cases not seeing the light of day after so long in his hands: and this is disastrous because his Chambers is the second other vital institution in the criminal justice system.

So, whither go our vital institutions? The ACA is another vital institution. It is its abject failure to act hard against the highly corrupt at the very top levels all these years that has allowed this pervasive corruption culture to thrive and grow within the public sector. Let me say it here: you will not stamp out corruption by only giving talks or by tackling only the lower rankers. The lower rankers are emboldened by the top-level corruption that could get away.

Can the new ACA chief, drawn from within the ACA ranks itself for the first time, show a greater and singular dedication to his bounden duty? We shall see and I wish him strength and success. But so far he has not shown the kind of mettle that we must expect from people in his new post. He must be proactive and independent!

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