

Can't leave all to MACC

How to stop venal ways of officials

WHEN it comes to ambition, Malaysia is big on it. Take the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) of Transparency International, an annual ranking of nations from the least corrupt to the most. Ranked 57 among 180 nations last year, Malaysia has set itself to be among the top 25 least corrupt by 2033. Quite a climb for a nation that scored just 50 out of a possible 100 points. Achievable? Yes, if backed up by right action. But statements by ministers — as often issued when officers under their administration are arrested — that they will leave it entirely to the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) or the police are not directionally right. There are two dangers in such statements. One, without action, ambition may remain just a dream. What is worse, the dream may turn into a nightmare, the second danger.

Take the case of the arrest on Thursday by the MACC of a deputy director in Kuala Lumpur City Hall for allegedly taking monthly bribes from illegal traders. And Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territories) Dr

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Zaliha Mustafa's take on it? After saying that she would leave it entirely to the MACC to investigate the allegation, she went on to tell reporters at an event thus: “Ultimately, we will know the result of the investigations by the MACC, whether it involves taking bribes or poor governance.” If by leaving it entirely to MACC, she meant not interfering in the investigation, we say bravo. But why wait for the MACC to get

back to investigate poor governance? The Prime Minister's Department has the power to do so now. The fact that there are so many foreign traders operating businesses meant for locals is evidence enough that somewhere high up in City Hall, a few grasping officers, if not some, are turning a blind eye to graft.

When the MACC moves in, it is already too late. Good governance is to make it unnecessary for the MACC to move in. As Datuk Seri Dr Akhbar Satar, a specialist in organisational criminology and president of Malaysian Integrity and Governance Society, says: “All bosses — from supervisors, heads of departments to ministers — are accountable and must take responsibility rather than passing the buck to the MACC.” To him, if effective preventive measures are practised, corruption can be reduced. Recent arrests by the MACC across a cross-section of the civil service point indubitably to loopholes in the governance system. And very senior officers are exploiting them to the fullest advantage when they, as leaders, should be leading by example. There is no doubt that these are tainted souls, but the blemish doesn't stop with them. Akhbar says corruption is, like all crimes, a learned crime, and the errant leaders are teaching their underlings to be corrupt. They must be excised before they ruin the reputation of the dedicated, hardworking and conscientious officers in the civil service. For sure, it is the job of the prime minister to set the CPI target for the nation. But the ministers must not just leave it to him alone to marshal the nation there. They, too, must help take the nation there. One thing for sure, leaving everything to the MACC will not get us there.