



## On the beat

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IF the men are failing, then faith should logically be placed in two women who embody competency and integrity to take the reins in running two important government agencies.

Datuk Seri Dr Maimunah Mohd Sharif was named Kuala Lumpur's Mayor last week, and at her first press conference, she laid down the law for her zero tolerance for corruption.

Then there's Customs director-general Datuk Anis Rizana Mohd Zainudin, who assumed the role last September.

The two tough ladies, hand-picked by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim for their abilities, have declared their readiness to combat graft and abuses of power.

Malaysians can be assured that their pledges aren't empty promises, the true bane of our existence.

Maimunah said she wants Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) to be seen as a local authority with integrity, accountability and transparency.

The timing of her installation as Kuala Lumpur's first woman mayor coincided with a DBKL enforcement deputy director and his assistant being charged at the Shah Alam Sessions Court with two counts of soliciting and accepting bribes from the operator of an unlicensed entertainment centre.

Muhammad Irwan Abdullah, 44, and Zahari Muhammad, 34, were jointly charged for soliciting RM200,000 and receiving RM160,000 monthly from a man as an inducement for not taking enforcement action against unlicensed entertainment premises under his supervision.

Muhamad Irwan also pleaded not guilty to a third corruption charge for allegedly receiving RM130,000 in cash from the same individual in a similar charge over an unlicensed entertainment centre managed by the man.

Although debatable, DBKL can't cover itself in glory now as an institution. In fact, it has a history of urban legends of the nefarious kind.



**Women in charge:** Newly-minted KL Mayor Maimunah (left) and Customs director-general Anis are ready for the tough battle ahead after they declared war on graft and the abuse of power. — Photos: The Star

# Fit for the job

It's no longer a man's world and high time gender equality bared its fangs for a better Malaysia.

Gutsy Maimunah is no stranger to managing local government authorities, as she was mayor of the Penang Island Municipal Council and was also the first woman president of the Seberang Prai Municipal Council.

Another civil servant in the spotlight is Anis, who detailed her battle against corruption as the top of her agenda.

She has declared that the Customs Department, an arguably stained institution, will not protect officers or personnel found guilty of corruption and abusing their power for personal gain, describing these offences as "unforgivable".

She said these actions had not only tarnished the country's image and reputation but also affected most of the staff who are honest and dedicated.

Between May and July, numerous Customs officers were charged with a variety of corruption offences in various states, mostly involving transactions at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA).

This was a follow-up to the arrests of 34 Customs officers at KLIA and 11 officers at Port Klang by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC).

The activities of the "flying containers" syndicate are believed to have led to RM3.5bil in tax leakages for the country.

MACC seized RM4.4mil in cash, believed to be obtained from the proceeds of corruption by

Customs officers suspected to be involved in the case.

Also seized were four Yamaha XMAX motorcycles worth RM28,000 each, a luxury multi-purpose vehicle worth more than RM200,000, a used BMW car, jewellery, luxury watches, as well as a plot of land, all of which were bought with cash.

MACC Chief Commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki said the agency had identified more than 100 companies involved in the syndicate, which had been operating for more than a decade in Port Klang.

The companies, he said, acted as intermediaries for the payment of bribes to rogue Customs officers.

The probe has also seen MACC liaising with Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau to track down a Singaporean believed to be a key figure behind the syndicate.

We're certainly seeing early results since Anis began helming the Customs Department, as the number of illegal cigarettes seized and confiscated has increased by over 20% in 1Q 2024 compared with the same period in 2023, according to the Malaysia Integrity and Governance Society (MIG).

Illegal cigarette prevalence in Malaysia has seen an improve-

ment from 56.4% in January 2024 to 55.4% in March, according to Nielsen's Illicit Cigarette Study in Malaysia.

"When the current Customs director-general, Datuk Anis Rizana Mohd Zainudin, was appointed on Sept 23 last year, she vowed to seriously go all out to address corruption," MIG president Datuk Seri Dr Akhbar Satar was quoted as saying.

Recent news reports have also put a spotlight on a series of high-profile raids, including the RM12.8mil haul in contraband cigarettes and liquor made by Melaka Customs in two separate operations in Johor.

In Negri Sembilan, Customs seized over RM600,000 worth of illicit cigarettes and liquor from a three-storey bungalow rented by Bangladesh nationals, revealed a news report.

Maimunah is known as a "turn-around specialist", a skill set that is common among companies in the private sector, but in this situation, it's local government, or more specifically, municipal councils that have benefited.

When she took over the Seberang Prai Municipal Council in 2011, it was in a complete financial mess, but by the end of her term in 2017, the council had a surplus in its budget.

Her achievements caught the attention of the United Nations, and in 2017 she was appointed executive director of UN-Habitat at the level of under-secretary general by the UN secretary-general, and in 2018 she assumed her role at UN-Habitat headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.

Crucially, she was headhunted for the job, and again displayed her turn-around ability, putting things right at the headquarters.

Born to a poor rubber tapping family in Kuala Pilah, Negri Sembilan, she had to wake up every morning at 4am to help the family, but that didn't stop her pursuing her studies until the tertiary level.

She studied town planning at

the University of Wales' Institute of Science and Technology before embarking on postgraduate studies at Universiti Sains Malaysia for a Master's degree.

She is married to businessman Adli Lai Abdullah, and they have two adult daughters. Amira is working while Atira, who is now a businesswoman, was a former student of SMJK (C) Heng Ee in Penang.

Realistically, it would be impossible for Maimunah and Anis to battle graft alone.

"I alone cannot do it because we have 9,000 City Hall officers. So I am asking department heads and the executive management to monitor. We also have partners from MACC," said Maimunah.

"We educate and provide knowledge, but if civil servants are determined to be corrupt, I will not hesitate to take action."

She said it was vital for City Hall staff to have strong integrity and a firm awareness of rejecting corruption.

For Anis, she has reminded her staff that those who are stationed at airports need to understand that Malaysia's reputation is always on the line through the services they render, so corruption, leaking government's secrets, and abusing one's position for personal gain will not be tolerated.

Both Maimunah and Anis certainly need plenty of support since their bold efforts will surely be unpopular among rogue officers who may still be holding powerful positions.

There could possibly be acts of sabotage to undermine their leadership. The duo must be mindful of these responses, and slowly and meticulously strategise their fight to ensure effectiveness.

For Malaysians who have routinely and repeatedly been let down, news of these two appointments is encouraging, and these ladies can be assured of our support.