

Regulate political financing

By Arman Ahmad and Suzanna Pillay

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RESEARCH: Experts call for stricter measures to curb corruption

GEORGE TOWN: GLOBAL Movement of Moderates chief executive officer Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah says it is time for measures to curb political corruption in the country.

He said the Malaysian Corruption Barometer 2014 released by Transparency International Malaysia (TIM) on Wednesday, which revealed among others that political parties are the most corrupt, confirmed another research done earlier, which showed that the most trusted people are doctors and the most distrusted were politicians.

Although the survey showed that Malaysia had improved in terms of perception of corruption with 36 per cent of the respondents stating that corruption had decreased over the last two years, 45 per cent of the respondents felt that political parties were perceived to be the most corrupt, replacing the police who were at last year's top spot.

Police scored a close second, followed by public officials/civil servants, parliament/legislature, business/private sector and the judiciary. He said when the National Unity Consultative Council (and of which he is a member) was launched by the Prime Minister conducted their town hall meetings, the issue of corruption in local politics often cropped up.

"Among others, we did 18 town hall meetings nationwide. 'Cerita' politician often came up," he told the New Sunday Times.

Saifuddin said Malaysia must come up with mechanisms to regulate political financing, as suggested earlier by Professor Terence Gomez, from University of Malaya.

"I support the idea. Political financing may cover a lot of things. For instance, the issue of where political parties get their funding from," he said.

He said currently during every election, candidates had to submit expenses for campaigns to the Elections Commission.

The expenditure ceiling given by law for candidates to of the state assembly, for example, is not more than RM50,000 and for parliament, not more than RM100,000.

"Every candidate will end up reporting that he doesn't spend more than the ceiling. Would people actually believe it?" he questioned.

Saifuddin said this was the only existing law regulating money expenditure.

"But the law doesn't ask you where the money comes from. And it is definitely not sufficient.

"What Gomez is calling for is more comprehensive regulations."

He said the government national integrity plan included political integrity, which touched on corruption.

However, he said to the best of his knowledge, it was hard to invite members from political parties to attend.

"More often than not the response is lukewarm," said Saifuddin, who has been in politics for 13 years.

He said some political parties were trying hard to eradicate corruption and money politics.

"For example, Umno has its own disciplinary committee, which has taken action against a few senior members. But more needs to be done."

Political analyst, associate professor Dr Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani said from an academic point of view, the reliability of the TIM survey was questionable.

"It was just a survey done with 2,000 Malaysians. It was the perception of people rather than whether corruption really happened.

The perception could be based on many sources especially the media, official reports and others.

"Because it was produced by Transparency International, some people accept it as the truth. It might have some flaws.

"We need more surveys or evidence to back up the finding," he said.

Azizuddin said this kind of research could give some knowledge about the reality of corruption in Malaysia.

Dr Noor Sulastry Yurni Ahmad, senior lecturer, Department of Anthropology and Sociology at University of Malaya, said the execution of government policies to reduce corruption in Malaysia including in politics, carried out progressively, had been gradually changing how the public looked at this matter.

"Public perception is not easy to change.

"The government and authorities have to make a tremendous effort in banishing corruption and to make the public believers.

"This has to be reflected by a decrease in the corruption percentage and as the TIM study showed, it has."

She said the fact that public expression of corruption issues had gone viral, especially involving local politicians, is a positive development to show corruption was viewed as a serious crime and it should be addressed.

Jason Ko, chief executive officer of Malaysian Youth Community, said the only way around corruption was to be transparent.

"Imagine if you had a service lane for those who can pay more for speedy service. It's open and transparent.

"Imagine if policemen got commission rewards for catching crooks or traffic offences, then you pay more to the policeman that catches the most crooks.

"On high-level corruption (over a million ringgit), include third party corporate auditors in every mega project bid. Or in this digital age, allow the registered voting public to vote via a government website and also to choose which company has the best price.

"That's real transparency -- everyone has a stake in key decisions involving billions and the lives of every resident affected.

"Right now, there is no accountability or separation of powers."