

Corruption: what does it mean to your generation? How can corruption, in your view, be reduced or eliminated in Malaysia?

“It’s either tea, coffee, or a five day sojourn in the custody suite,”

An ordinary person with the slightest ability to rationalize would, in a heartbeat, pounce at the offer of a potent pump of caffeine, which, paired with the right sum of payment, will have you walking under the sun again, a free man (and a clean one). It seems to be the case that life is no tough combat, really, when you have money. All you need to do, is to spend it wisely.

Humans, innately wanton beings. Where men trot, there will always be desire, awaiting satiation. With such tacit understanding borne in mind, one only has to go insofar as providing the suitable instruments to replete in order to access all privileges, and evade all consequences. This, is how corruption works, a strategic act of manipulation- to have people act in your favour- with the promise of fulfilling their wants and needs. Corruption utilizes the nature of greed, and further exploits the human weakness in order to ultimately wrest all circumstances into beneficial criteria and attain one’s goals. It is indeed an unethical practice, which will further stretch the sinews between the already polarized social classes to near breaking point, perpetuating inequality and marginalization. Moreover, the International Monetary Fund has estimated that an approximate 1.5 to 2 trillion dollars is lost to bribery annually, which equates to 2 percent of the global GDP. This has further proven that corruption, apart from being a social issue, impacts significantly the global economy. Even so, how many are aware when the convenience of oneself matters most?

Corruption, to our generation of ordinary citizens, is a brazen display of foolishness- to be vanquished by the human instinct to covet and crave, only to lose more in the long run. This generation, our generation, invariably stands as a worthy audience which has witnessed the almost theatrical culmination and anticlimax of governments: a democracy-driven rise to power, and the ugly fall from grace when the system was found to be wallowing in corruption. From bribery to embezzlement, money-laundering to blatant nepotism. Each exposé has only done so much to instill doubt and render us questioning the integrity of those who hold authority within the institution which governs, for it seems to be the case where the ones settled high on the social hierarchy are caught up in an agonizing turmoil while trying hard to preserve a nation of contented people. Such an act is analogous to self-drilling holes in a reservoir while endeavouring to cease the leaks by plugging in a finger. The cycle is endless, demeaning and perilous, for the leaks cannot be fixed and the reservoir with its marred barriers, is bound to give way to catastrophe. Najib Razak, Ferdinand Marcos and Dilma Rousseff so happen to have demonstrated the perils of short-sightedness, where short-term materialistic gratification was to be prioritized over the broader vision of a better future for their people and country. The outcome was clear: being ousted and facing charges for corruption offence. With bank accounts

frozen and ownership of properties seized, all is out to see how greed quickly turns on one, and that one's net worth can easily be nullified when it has been solicited through fraudulent means. Hence, to a young generation of us, these political figures set precedent, their downfall a major deterrent. Corruption is a sword, a double edged one, which if not cautious, could expedite one's demise.

As the Turkish saying goes: "The fish rots from the head down". When the ones on the apex of society trail blaze the custom of corrupting their way to success, it is no wonder that the common folk employ such an immoral method when dealing with sticky situations. Corruption has- as we all have come to realize- become a leeway to avoid liability. The penchant to escape responsibilities by offering "duit kopi" or tea money is already entrenched in our day-to-day routine it seldom takes a flinch before we offer to bribe authority. From driving licenses to speeding fines, corruption opens up an express lane which allows access to anything, and everything. It was July this year in Penang that five Road Transport Department (JPJ) officials and a former Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) personnel were charged with 63 counts of receiving bribes. This has come to testify how the abuse of power has evolved to an extent it is no longer a heinous crime, but a habitual act in our community. Furthermore, it is evident in our society, that the police force has high affinity to partake in corruption, demanding bribe from poorer, younger groups which are more likely to compromise and pay the hush money. With our enforcement officials involved in corruption, this really has us thinking: is our society actually safe when the reckless and irresponsible manage to get away scot-free? Albeit so, truth is that the exhumation of these clandestine liaisons has brought light to the fact that the people are more willing to break the silence encapsulating the matter of corruption with the aid of technology, and that the media is finally unshackled from the fear of defying the power wielders of the system. Yet, the milestone marks not only an achievement, but too, the emergence of the byproduct of the freedom to express- an unprecedented deluge of information, which borders on the corrupted side.

To a generation which relies greatly on technology, corruption can manifest in the form of information explosion. The Internet, overbrimming with data, information and knowledge has found itself vulnerable to an overwhelming tide of fallacies. We, as users, can no longer make sense of the information we have been presented, let alone tell the difference between legitimate and fabricated research material. When chaff and grain are unable to be separated, it will only lead to the degradation of information, for the chaff could be appreciated and the grain devalued. All for the wrong reasons. Fake research papers, brazen plagiarism and manipulated facts and figures have aggravated the swirl of confusion, wreaking havoc as wrong information finds its way into the real world. It is a disheartening reality to digest, when one comes to register that the basis of knowledge- to educate and enlighten- can be gnarled into utter nonsense. Moreover, the corruption of the media, an emerging chaos in the social scene right now, has been held accountable for fear mongering, spreading fake news which invokes anxiety, only to be dismissed later on by online clarifications through "tweets" and "posts". It is as if no one has learned from the boy who cried wolf, for in the words of the former President of the

United States, fake news will only create a treacherous “blasé” which can ultimately cost the security of the people and our nation. The prevalence of fake news can also result in the loss of trust towards the media, which is the main vessel of information. When this happens, curious people will seek out other routes to gain updates whilst the common folk either choose to revel in deception or to detach themselves from all falsehood, gradually losing track on current issues.

In an attempt to curb corruption in Malaysia, it is high time an education overhaul should take place. The focus should be recalibrated to accommodate critical thinking skills as well as instilling a sense of moral and social responsibility. Critical thinking skills should be honed to formulate judgements and arrive at rational decisions whereas a good inculcation of social and moral responsibility will ensure a generation content creators which value ethicality, thus the prevention of fallacious information spread. A revamp in our education could only be baby steps towards fully eliminating corruption, but each step taken is a step counted. On the other hand, political literacy also has to be cultivated within the people. The ability to equip oneself with a good understanding of the workings of a government and personal rights will take us two steps closer to wiping out corruption. It has to be made known that it is the ignorance of the people which continuously perpetuates corruption. Being insensitive to the status quo provides loopholes which renders one easily taken advantage of, and this so happens to explain why poorer and younger people so often fall victims to exploitation. Not being well-informed and having no experience in handling fear-power situations, they are likely to resort to corruption in order to access services, escape responsibilities or even just for the sake of convenience. The desperation to get things over and done with is most certainly an overlooked weakness, which once taken aim at, can be the main factor of defeat. With persistent effort, it will not take long before corruption, whether it is political, social or media, can be thoroughly eradicated.

First, it was the Panama Papers, then the 1MDB scandal. It is no fault in saying that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Yet, it is in our social setting- a democratic, liberal country- that absolute power does not exist, but rather, the narrow-mindedness of the people that is fueling the greed and desires of the ones in power. We, by choice, choose to be ignorant and self-absorbed in our comfort zones, reluctant to step out of these bubbles to see for ourselves, how much collusions we let loose, unaware how these illicit practices have cost a whole country's vision, ambition, and aspiration. Corruption undermines a system, inhibiting the economic, social and political development. How dare you question equality when you are afraid to point out the flaws in our system? Why do you grumble about the incompetent economy when you tremble to own up for your own mistakes and resort to paying the bribe? How could you try to sympathize with the poor when you are complicit in the practice of corruption? It should be known by now, that it has been the collective foolishness that has played kindle to the blazing corruption. It is about time we extinguish the flames.

Make that time now.

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