



Corruption

By: Ir. Zainal Abidin bin Othman (MIEM)

The immediate Past President of IEM Ir. Prof. Abang Abdullah bin Abang Ali raised the issue of corruption and bribery in the construction industry as discussed at the Anti-corruption Forum in the U.K. and in his departing note in the April 2005 issue of the Bulletin.

In the Integrity Forum on Construction Sector held on 12-13 September 2005 which forms part activity of the International Construction Week 2005, the President of the Malay Contractors Association, Datuk Roslan Awang Chik admitted that giving and receiving bribes have been a way of life in the construction sector and he raised his concerns that the society will suffer in the future if nothing is done to wipe out the habit.

The Malaysian Integrity Institute also reported an estimate of 15% of the population being engaged in corrupt practice, either in giving or receiving bribes.

In the follow up to this statement Ministers are demanding for proof of the allegations.

It is also interesting to note that within the same week, the President of Finland was interviewed by a Malaysian reporter in Helsinki and corruption was among the issues highlighted in the interview. "But today, we are one of the best in the world in terms of competitiveness and equality, and we are No. 1 on the list of least corrupt countries", said the President. She cited four important ways of tackling corruption: good governance, transparency, adequate wages for civil servants and creating a tradition where it is not honourable to take money.

From the above sequence of events and statements it can be said that the authorities and the players of corruption and the mass media are

coming to terms of the need to address this issue of corruption in general and at the moment focus on the construction sector .

It has been proposed that a code of ethics has to be drafted and implemented in the near future. Will this work?

Who are the players in the construction industry? They are the developers either public or private entity, the Architects, the Engineers, the Quantity Surveyors, the Land Surveyors, the Landscape Architects, the Interior Decorators, the Project Managers, the material suppliers, the equipment supplier, the various Authorities and of course the Contractors or the Master Builders.

As for code of professional conduct it is safe to say that the professionals within the above group are governed by their respective Code of Professional Conduct. Apart from the Code of Professional Conducts and they are also governed by the relevant Laws in conducting their services. These laws are not new, for it has been in place as early as mid sixties. Therefore those practicing professionals must be aware of their obligations in ethical issues such as corruption. There are registered professional engineers who are contractors. How are they playing their role in this effort to eradicate corruption in the construction sector?

If the laws are in place and the code of ethics are also in place why is there still problems with the escalating trend in corruption? It has been said that the more corrupt a society, the more numerous are its laws. Are we probably reaching such a stage in our society?

Despite the verbal statements made in public on corruption, reliable data is limited. Corruption is hard to define, let alone measure. The most widely known measures would probably the measures

produced by the Economist Intelligence Unit and the Transparency International (TI). Based on the 2004 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) published by TI, Malaysia stood at number 39 together with Tunisia. In comparison Singapore is ranked 5, Australia 9 and New Zealand second behind Finland.

The President of Finland mentioned four key factors in combating corruption. These factors are also relevant in the Malaysia National Integrity Plan (NIP). The NIP dated April 2004 identified a set of core values to be internalised by all members of organisations and society at large. These are honesty, trustworthiness, wisdom, fairness, transparency and gratitude.

The NIP also identified the factors of five categories that could undermine integrity; namely individual, leadership, system and procedures, structure and institution, and culture. Within each category, factors are identified that could lead to deterioration of integrity. The overall objective of the NIP is to establish a fully moral and ethical society whose citizens are strong in religious and spiritual values and imbued with the highest ethical standards. Other aspects covered in the NIP booklet are ethics and integrity, target 2008, overall approach in enhancing integrity, strategies in implementing the NIP, factors towards success, and action plan. Engineers should make an attempt to read through this booklet in order to appreciate the Government's vision in combating our illness which is of our own making.

All this noble plan and targets will only come true if the society realised the impacts of our illness towards our future generations well being. ■