

Never Lowering Our Guard

Michael Hershman – Co-Founder of Transparency International

Corruption is one of the greatest roadblocks to a nation's progress. At the forefront of the war against corruption is a non-governmental, non-partisan global network, Transparency International. Since its inception in 1993, the Berlin-based organisation has been bringing together relevant players from government bodies, business, civil society and the media, to promote transparency in public administration, elections and business dealings. TI's chapters and contacts worldwide have also been using advocacy campaigns to lobby governments into implementing anti-corruption reforms.

TRANSPARENCY REVIEW sat down with Michael Hershman – the co-founder of TI and Chairman for the International Performance Review Committee for Malaysia's Government Transformation Programme (GTP) – to talk about where Malaysia stands with its continuing efforts to eradicate corruption.



Slow but Steady

According to Mr Hershman, Malaysia is making steady progress in battling corruption, although there is still a long way to go. "There are no quick fixes when you're dealing with a problem of such magnitude," he said.

Nonetheless, he noted that Malaysia is on the right track, as the Government has made fighting corruption a priority through its generous allocation of resources for the Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission (MACC).

A strong weapon in the government's arsenal against corruption, he added, is the setting up of various initiatives as part of the National Key Result Area (NKRA) – Fighting Corruption under the GTP. These include the Convicted Corruption Offenders Database – also known as the 'name and shame database' – which publishes the names and faces of prosecuted offenders on the NKRA website (www.sprm.gov.my); the Whistleblower Protection Act 2010 that protects those who report acts of corruption and the MyPROCUREMENT (<http://myprocurement.treasury.gov.my/>) portal that lists contracts and awarded tenders of public projects for public viewing.

These initiatives have been favourably received by the public. In TI's 2010 *Global Corruption Barometer*, 48% of local respondents rated the government's

actions as "effective," which surpassed the original target for 37% "effective" answers.

Picking up the pace in its fight against corruption, the Government has also introduced more initiatives such as the setting up of 14 special sessions courts to ensure that corruption cases are tried within a year, as well as the Integrity Officer Compliance unit, set up for the purpose of monitoring an organisation's internal affairs thus increasing its transparency. Recognising the importance of integrity to encourage transparency and curb corruption, Mr Hershman pointed out that he has proposed for the latter to be appointed in all federal agencies in the country.

As of now, there are Integrity Officer Compliance units set up in enforcement agencies throughout the country. The unit will be responsible for conducting reviews on programmes within the agencies to ensure transparency, efficiency and honesty. Another part of their task will be to report corruption cases to the MACC. It will then be at the MACC's discretion whether to allow the integrity officer to proceed with the investigation or to take over.

Alert, Watchful, and On Guard

Being the Chairman for the International Performance Review Committee for Malaysia's Government Transformation Programme (GTP), Mr Hershman is highly involved in monitoring the country's

progress in its efforts to increase transparency. Having been to the country four times in this year alone (April, May, July and November), he is happy to note that the response among government officials towards the various anti corruption initiatives have been "very much in favour."

However, he noted that Malaysia's journey had only just begun. Using a boxing analogy, he pointed out that "Malaysia cannot lower its guard. Like boxing, the moment we lower our guard, we will get knocked out," he said.

"Corruption has a habit of creeping back in when no one is looking" he warned.

Looking Ahead

Being an international expert on issues of transparency, Mr Heshman has been sought by numerous countries and organisations for his advice on the topic. When asked about the perception of the international community on Malaysia's anti-corruption efforts, he advised Malaysians not worry so much about how others perceive them. While acknowledging that there is a sense of pride involved for Malaysians, he pointed out that they should instead focus on the issue of fighting corruption, and not the perception of the world.

This is because when it comes to introducing new anti-corruption initiatives and policies, there will be three stages of

7.6 out of 10

Malaysia's score in the Transparency International 2011 Bribe Payers Index.

7.8

Global average score on the Transparency International 2011 Bribe Payers Index.

48%

Percentage of respondents rating the Malaysian government's transparency initiatives as 'effective'.
(Transparency International 2010 Global Corruption Barometre)

reactions to this. The first is 'disbelief' – a sense of cynicism that the policies and initiatives will not pull through. This is then followed by a general acceptance of the new incentive, but a failure to recognise its significance and relevance. Finally, the public comes to accept the new procedures accompanied by a willingness to implement them. According to Mr Hershman, Malaysia is currently at the first stage, with regards to both local and international reaction, but it is a matter of time, before it reaches the second stage and progresses to the third stage.

More importantly, he pointed out that for 2012, Malaysia should welcome the year by focusing on ensuring the consistent implementation of the various initiatives launched in 2011. As he succinctly put it "initiatives are just words, if they are not implemented consistently." Thus, Malaysia's key focus for the next one and a half years, he said, is to follow through with a holistic plan to ensure that all anti-corruption initiatives complement each other and are pushed through.

Finally, when we asked Michael Hershman for his feedback on TRANSPARENCY REVIEW magazine, he gave a broad smile and replied "I can't wait until there is more, as reporting is one of the keys to fighting corruption." From protecting whistleblowers via the Whistleblower Protection Act 2010, to producing the first magazine in the world solely dedicated to fighting corruption, Malaysia is sparing no effort in eradicating corruption in the country, on par with its aim of becoming a high income nation by 2020.

Timeline of Malaysia's Anti-Corruption Initiatives

