

Face to face

Datuk Khairul Dzaimie Daud

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THE nation was shocked when 39 Immigration Department officers were arrested for operating a syndicate providing "stamping services" to foreigners and illegal immigrants.

In addressing this serious integrity issue, department director-general Datuk Khairul Dzaimie Daud shares how his zero tolerance stand on corruption will be aided by technology to reduce and eventually eliminate opportunities for the abuse of power.

> How did you discover the rogue officers?

When I came into the department last year, I was intrigued by how some junior officers were living a lifestyle that did not exactly match their pay packets.

These officers would go on long holidays overseas at destinations like New Zealand and London. Some owned superbikes and flashy cars. Some lived in residential areas beyond their affordability. This didn't make sense as they earned less than RM4,000 a month.

A team was set up to collect information and build a case against officers that we identified. It took us about eight months to gather enough information.

Once we had enough, we roped in the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC). While we can arrest our own officers for wrongdoings, MACC's involvement added credibility to the case.

> The MACC has lauded you for your role, as they say getting department heads to cooperate to act against corruption is tough. Your comment?

When I took office, one of the first things I did was to address my men. I spoke about the responsibility entrusted to us and the important role we play in protecting the country.

We need to be patriotic in our work managing immigration matters and foreigners because the security of the country is in our hands.

While I assured them that I will do what I can to look after their welfare, I said there would be no compromise if the department's integrity is at stake.

> What are some of the concerns you have for your officers' welfare?

Housing is one issue, and we have been asking for more allocation to overcome this problem by having more quarters built for immigration personnel. My minister (Home Minister Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin) is concerned about this and wants it to be resolved.

We also fought for our officers to receive the RM200 special monthly allowance for Covid-19 frontliners.

In terms of promotion, previously, the highest post for immigration personnel in the "KP" scheme was grade KP52. We applied to the Public Service Department (PSD) for this to be elevated to grade KP54.

Alhamdulillah, it was approved. And we have also managed to get several flexi posts for grades KP52 and KP48. Before, these positions were only meant for PTD (administrative and diplomatic) officers but we convinced the PSD

Technology vs corruption

The Immigration Department's director-general shares with *Sunday Star* how illegal activities were uncovered in his department and how new systems will help reduce situations where power could be abused.

to make it flexi, meaning it can be filled by either PTD officers or those from the immigration service. There is more in the pipeline to improve the service's scheme.

> Immigration officers' involvement in the syndicate shocked the public, even becoming a source of mockery. What would you say to the public?

I am extremely disappointed. Not only did they tarnish the department's reputation, they betrayed the country.

I've told my officers time and again that their role as immigration officers is a patriotic duty and must be carried out with honesty.

Yes, there are a few bad apples but, that being said, there are still many good men and women among the other 14,890 staff members.

I hope the public can see beyond the actions of these few and see the good, committed and dedicated service given by the rest of the team.

> Can corruption and abuse of power really be overcome?

One thing that we have learned from the Covid-19 pandemic is that we need to break the chain of infection. In this case, we can break the chain of illegal practices by using technology.

We will continue instilling good values through seminars, integrity programmes and religious talks but I believe these programmes are no longer enough to deal with integrity issues. We are dealing with a new generation of civil servants.

One of the thrusts in the organisation's anti-corruption plan is the adoption of technology in our fight against corruption.

> How can technology put an end to the abuse of power?

We have developed several online services, including an online appointment system. With this system in place, we have eliminated the process of having to queue for numbers. You know, in the past, there were officers who actually sold these queue numbers? The online appointment system has eliminated one area of possible power abuse.

We have also introduced e-payment facilities for our services. Only in extreme cases will we allow payments to be made in cash. By doing this, there will no longer be incidents of "kehilangan wang awam" (loss of public money) when a certain amount of cash goes missing or is unaccounted for. There is no more of that.

We will also help to make significant savings in public funds when the services of security companies are no longer needed to send cash collections to the banks because of our e-payment only policy.

Also, by introducing the MyTravelPass (a single window

system to manage entrance and exit applications) we have managed to reduce the discretionary power of immigration officers, hence closing off another possible avenue of power abuse.

I must say that my IT team has been very efficient in coming up with new online systems. They are very dedicated and have risen to the challenge.

> How will the National Integrated Immigration System (NIISE) help when it's in place?

When the system is up and running, there will be no more manual stamping of passports. Old practices like this will be eliminated. No one can claim to offer "stamping services".

If a passport holder has immigration stamps after the system is in place, we will immediately know that something is not right.

Passports will be scanned and information will go into the system, which will recognise the passport holder through an ID. Stamping will be replaced by digital printing of social visit passes on passports.

If a Mr Smith from the UK comes to Malaysia again after his first visit, he need not queue to have his passport examined by an officer. He can just go through the autogate as the system will recognise him.

The target is for NIISE to be fully operational by 2023.

> In the meantime, how do you monitor officers for corruption?

CCTVs will be installed at immigration counters, mainly at entry points in KLIA, KLIA2, Johor Baru and Kota Kinabalu. This way, we can monitor our personnel's work.

In "Ops Selat" case, there were reports to say that officers involved had "acted" as if they stamped passports belonging to foreigners but they did not actually do so. With the cameras there, we will be able to immediately detect any discrepancies at the counters.

We will also intensify spot checks to ensure the "no handphone" policy is adhered to by officers on duty. Regulation

dictates that officers cannot carry handphones while on duty. We found out that while they do leave their handphones behind with the supervisor, those in the syndicate would have a secret one that they use to arrange "settings" or deals with foreigners and illegal immigrants.

> Immigration and health authorities were the first frontliners dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. What initial challenges did the Immigration Department face?

Some time in December 2019, I was cycling with friends when a call from the National Disaster Management Agency came in, requesting that I attend a meeting on a coronavirus, chaired by the then deputy prime minister. This was the first official meeting on the pandemic.

The outbreak, which started in Wuhan, China, had spread to other countries - Japan, South Korea and Iran. The government wanted to impose travel restrictions on (people arriving in Malaysia from) lockdown cities of foreign countries.

Then came the challenge: How do we enforce this policy? There were many "what ifs" - what if travellers flew out of "safe" cities but had visited lockdown cities, what if a Chinese national holding a passport issued in Wuhan claimed to live in another city, what if there are long-term pass holders who live in Malaysia but are stranded in affected cities and

want to return to the country?

To overcome these challenges, we introduced a declaration form. It is a legal document under the Immigration Act and visitors must reveal their travel history. If they are caught giving false information or if they withhold information, they can be expelled immediately. And it worked!

Another challenge was to attend the daily meetings, including on weekends, and to keep my superiors updated almost in real time on issues at the airports, issues with foreign embassies, and issues affecting our people stranded in lockdown cities. I had to always be on alert - thankfully, I had the support of a dedicated team.

> What are the department's plans for 2021?

For one, we have to implement the recalibration programme (for undocumented foreign workers) efficiently. Our target is to see 250,000 illegal immigrants participating in the programme.

We will also continue with our three main focuses for 2020, which had to be postponed because of the pandemic. They are to improve our services through technology, to make e-payment a compulsory payment method, and intensify enforcement when the recalibration programme ends in June 2021.

We also want to position the department as one of the leading agencies contributing towards economic growth.

We should also study our regulations, identify those that may contribute to corrupt practices and see how they can be relaxed without affecting the country's security. For example, we have made a ruling that foreigners who overstayed from January to Dec 31, 2020, due to the pandemic need not obtain an exit pass to leave the country. This helps prevent possible power abuse or corruption as there is no need to "deal" or "negotiate" with our officers.

Relaxation of immigration procedures, without compromising the country's security, is something we want to explore.

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