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Letter to the Editor

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The Malaysian Epstein Class Has Plundered Enough: Parliament Must Act

The RM13 billion hole blown into Lembaga Tabung Haji is not an isolated tragedy. It is a warning.

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Tabung Haji exposed creative accounting, opaque transactions and reckless decisions involving the savings of millions of Malaysians. More disturbingly, it revealed how a system can allow those entrusted with a public institution to take enormous risks while ordinary citizens bear the consequences.

This is the deeper problem Malaysia must confront: an entrenched Malaysian version of the “**Epstein Class**” – a network of politically connected elites, brokers, professionals and institutional enablers who can convert access and influence into private wealth while insulating themselves from accountability.

CAP warned about this class in our recent [commentary](#) on the Tabung Haji scandal. The government – and especially Parliament – must now take the threat seriously.

Look at the record. Malaysia has endured 1MDB, with liabilities exceeding RM50 billion; the Port Klang Free Zone debacle, where costs escalated from RM1.1 billion to an estimated RM12.4 billion; the alleged misappropriation of RM1.5 billion in Sabah rural development funds; and corruption allegations involving systems critical to national security.

The problem is not simply a few “bad apples”. It is the network around them: the intermediaries who arrange deals, professionals who provide legitimacy, officials who look the other way and institutions that fail to stop abuse.

The most disturbing question is therefore not merely **who stole the money?**

It is **who made it possible?**

Consider the Auditor-General.

The Tabung Haji controversy raises deeply uncomfortable questions about the appointment and performance of the country's most important public auditing office. Tan Sri Dr Madinah Mohamad, who served as Auditor-General from 2017 to 2019, issued an unqualified audit opinion on Tabung Haji's 2017 financial statements. The subsequent Royal Commission questioned that decision.

This raises a fundamental question: **how can someone whose professional qualifications and technical background are apparently so poorly matched to the demands of such a critical technical position be appointed to head the nation's supreme audit institution?**

That appointment could not have happened in a vacuum.

Someone had to recommend it. Someone had to approve it. Someone had to assess the candidate's qualifications. Someone had to conduct the relevant checks.

What role did the Public Service Department play? What role did the Prime Minister's Office play? What did the appointment and security-vetting processes actually examine?

And where was the **Malaysian Institute of Accountants**?

If Malaysia's premier professional accounting body is committed to maintaining professional standards, what did it do when questions arose about the country's highest auditing office? Did it raise concerns? Did it investigate? Did it ask how such an appointment could be made?

These are not questions of personal vindictiveness. They are questions of institutional accountability.

And they point to something even more disturbing.

Perhaps the system does not merely fail to see corruption. Perhaps there are people within the system who benefit from its failures - and therefore have an interest in looking the other way.

That is what makes the Epstein Class so dangerous.

It is not necessarily a secret organisation. It is a system of relationships and mutual protection. One person gets appointed. Another approves a transaction. Another provides the professional signature. Another fails to ask questions. Another delays an investigation.

Nobody needs to give an explicit order.

Everyone simply understands how the system works.

Indonesia's civil society has described such networks as a **"Jaringan Buruk"** -- a rotten web of brokers, officials and professionals who facilitate corruption. Malaysia needs to confront the possibility that we have developed our own version.

The danger extends beyond Tabung Haji.

The 2007 Lingam video controversy raised allegations concerning judicial appointments and the fixing of cases. In 2019, a Court of Appeal judge made serious allegations about interference within the judiciary and called for a Royal Commission of Inquiry. Allegations of corruption and collusion have also periodically reached the police and other enforcement institutions.

Each case is different. But together they demand one question:

What happens when the institutions designed to police power become vulnerable to the very networks they are supposed to police?

And what of government-linked companies?

GLCs control enormous pools of public wealth. Their boards and executives are entrusted with Malaysians' money. Yet when things go catastrophically wrong, losses are ultimately socialised onto taxpayers while those responsible may retain their wealth, connections and status.

That is the ultimate injustice.

The factory worker saving RM50 a month. The fisherman trying to feed his family. The pensioner counting every ringgit. The teacher working a second job.

These Malaysians cannot gamble with their savings.

But people managing billions sometimes can.

When a public institution loses billions, ordinary citizens pay through taxes, lost opportunities, weaker public services and diminished trust in government.

Malaysia therefore needs more than another investigation after another scandal.

We need to attack the **network that makes the scandal possible**.

CAP calls on **all Members of Parliament – government and opposition – to do much more. Much, much more.**

Parliament must stop treating each scandal as an isolated episode to be debated for a few days before disappearing from public attention.

MPs must demand answers about appointments, procurement, professional oversight, regulatory failures and the networks of individuals who repeatedly appear around the country's biggest scandals.

They must strengthen parliamentary oversight of GLCs and public institutions. They must demand transparency in senior appointments. They must protect whistleblowers. They must insist that professional bodies answer for failures within their own professions.

And they must urgently revisit and strengthen the **Economic Sabotage Bill**.

The law should make deliberate or reckless destruction of public wealth through abuse of public resources a serious offence. Where there is evidence of knowing participation, accountability must extend beyond the person who signs the cheque to the intermediaries and professional enablers who knowingly make the transaction possible.

There must also be effective asset recovery, professional disqualification and, where legally appropriate, removal of honours.

A title must never become a shield against accountability.

Malaysia does not need another slogan about fighting corruption.

We need to change the incentives that make corruption worthwhile.

The Tabung Haji scandal should be the line in the sand.

Parliament must act – not merely talk.

Every MP, regardless of party, should ask: Who enabled this? Who benefited? Who knew? Who looked away? And why were they allowed to continue?

Because if Parliament cannot answer those questions, we will eventually face another Tabung Haji. Another 1MDB. Another institution hollowed out from within.

Malaysia's hardworking citizens have sacrificed enough.

Their savings are not casino chips. Public institutions are not private fiefdoms. Government contracts are not political rewards.

And public trust is not something powerful people can steal and expect taxpayers to replace.

The Epstein Class has had its feast. Parliament must now close the table.

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