

Appeal to the individual human spirit

IN his keynote address at the Congress on Integrity series, Datuk Anwar Fazal reminded the audience of "the power of one".

"Never underestimate the power of the single individual," he said. "History has shown that through their example and action, individuals have transformed the world."

All the speakers urged citizen participation.

Stories of having to pay the Road Transport Department examiner, through driving school instructors, to obtain one's licence abound. Chooi Mun Sou recounted that one of the junior lawyers in his company had taken the driving test seven times before she passed. "I'm very proud of her."

Chooi urged the public to have courage. "No one has been arrested for lodging a complaint."

Faith was important, he said. "The public perception is that if it's a VIP, nothing happens."

We act according to a "common denominator," measured by the theory that "everyone does it, so we do it too," said K. Haridas, JUST executive committee member, summing up the attitude stereotyped by the traffic policeman. "Mahu bayar sayu, mahu bayar kerajan? (Do you want to pay me, or the government?)"

"Perhaps you need only pay him RM10. But if you choose to pay the government a bigger sum, you will be saving him and yourself from a corrupt act," he said.

Ernest Balasingam, the vice-



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chairman of Ipoh City Watch, urged Malaysians to get to know their local representatives.

"Invite them to breakfast." Keep up the dialogue.

"When your issues are not addressed, you have legal recourse."

"In Ipoh, people think Malays and



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Muslims get everything. This is not true. **There are four bungalows built on surrau land,**" he said.

Balasingam was among those who had picked up the cudgels against the overnight sprouting of the **Bali Bali** pub in 2001. The state executive council said it was good

for development. But for the residents it meant noise and nuisance.

Lawyer Datuk Param Cumaraswamy, president of Transparency International — Malaysia chapter, urged "constant public vigilance" on a national scale.

"Is the government providing us

the space to express ourselves in the face of restrictions on public demonstrations?" he questioned. His proffered solutions included that:

- political parties not be in business;
- political parties not control the press;
- a "reasonable time" elapse before senior public servants are absorbed into the corporate sector;
- there be a code of conduct, enforceable through the office of an ombudsman.

To this last, he recounted witnessing in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea an enquiry into the then Minister of Labour who was facing 74 charges of corruption.

During the course of the hearing, he implicated the Minister of Finance.

The latter in turn implicated the Prime Minister. So because of an ombudsman's enquiry, "a whole government fell."

Dr Irene Fernandez of Tenaganita asked the difficult Asian question: "Where does one draw the line between gifts and corruption? A sofa set, jewellery? Where does it end?"

"Some of us think that privatisation is good because privatisation increases efficiency. But this means that the government is inefficient. We should be looking for ways to make the government efficient, not just privatise as an easy way out," she said.