

# Do not let the rot set into HOTS

## TWO-PRONGED:

Teaching of high-order thinking skills goes hand in hand with ethics

**T**HE number of Customs officers being charged with graft seems to increase by the day.

This includes senior and mid-level ranking officials charged as part of Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission's crackdown on Customs officers over alleged corruption in connection with the smuggling of contraband items worth RM4 billion in unpaid duties.

So far some 30 people have been arrested from around the country.

How many more will be hauled up is anybody's guess but the existing number is sufficient to give an indication of what could be the worst case of corruption involving civil servants in the country.

With the likelihood of the involvement of foreigners, Interpol maybe called in to investigate.

The contraband came from as far as China, India, Sweden, Scotland, Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia, violating all procedures in the process.

Spanning three years, the scam seems to suggest a well-coordinated plan at work. While those who received bribes are being charged, the other side of the story is still untold, namely the ones who provided the bribes.

In the case of tobacco, for example, it has been previously documented by the World Health Organisation that some tobacco companies are involved in orchestrating the smuggling so that the intensity of the activities

can be used to argue against higher tobacco taxes imposed by the authorities. These tactics often worked.

These illicit activities are a good example of high-order thinking skills (HOTS), despite the complaint that schools are not emphasising them.

If you think that the Customs case is an isolated one, how about the latest wave of automated teller machine (ATMs) scams involving close to 20 ATMs in three banks and three states?

More than RM3 million have been siphoned off. While the suspected gang members are largely foreigners, it is claimed that they need to know the inner workings of the banks involved.

This points to the involvement of insiders — most probably Malaysians — to assist in hatching a bold plan.

The police have described the scam as "highly professional" with the use of hi-tech devices which they have not encountered before.



**Dzulkifli Abdul Razak** is an honorary professor at University of Nottingham and Chair of Leadership at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia. Email him at [education@nst.com.my](mailto:education@nst.com.my)

The leak in Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah papers is yet another case in point that this column has commented on (*Learning Curve*, Sept 21).

Given the frequency, diversity and complexity of the cases highlighted, one would think that HOTS are in abundance, except that they are wrongly applied.

It is worth reiterating that it is by no means sufficient just to impart these skill sets without teaching the values and ethics that must be nurtured as an integral part of the learning process. In this way, HOTS are less likely to be misused.

Ethics and values must be the foundation of education, upon which skills and knowledge are rooted in and firmly built on.

This paves a clearer path ahead to arrive at the vision of Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan or National Education Philosophy (NEP) with the notion of *insan seimbang* or "the balanced human being" who is *sepadu* (holistic) and *harmonis* (harmonious).

In addition, the NEP has identified intellectual, physical, emo-

tional and spiritual aspects that must be given equal emphasis in order to strive for the desired balance.

Ethical- and values-based education is now recognised as vital to nurture global citizens capable of caring and peaceful living.

Values must be acculturated as a matter of habit so that they are not only seen as "value-added" but — more importantly — "value-enshrined" as a way of life, beyond the workplace.

This is in tandem with the NEP focus on *berakhlak mulia*, *bertanggungjawab* and *berketerampilan* as well as *mempunyai keupayaan mencapai kesejahteraan diri*.

This can be better achieved by moving away from siloed approaches through religious or moral classes only.

Rather, the approach must be across the board and the lessons put into practice, in particular outside of the classroom, in the society at large. Otherwise, HOTS can easily rot as we have witnessed.