

A-G: ‘Firmer and faster’ action can end Putrajaya’s repeat wastages

By Ida Lim

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A-G Tan Sri Ambrin Buang said department chiefs should act quickly on incompetence, while saying that greater care should be taken to prevent wastages of public funds, October 8, 2013. — AFP pic



KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 8 — Repeated cases of Putrajaya’s weaknesses in carrying out projects need to be addressed with ‘firmer and faster’ action on civil servants handling taxpayers’ money, Auditor-General (A-G) Tan Sri Ambrin Buang has said.

When asked to reflect on the changes in the civil service since he took on the role of Auditor-General in 2006, Ambrin indicated a slow improvement in Putrajaya’s performance in implementing projects.

“In respect of Performance Audits, it is very difficult to say there is much progress in the area of the Government programmes/activities/projects as irregularities and weaknesses continued to be

highlighted in the Audit Report every year,” Ambrin told The Malay Mail Online in an email interview yesterday, less than a week after the release of the Auditor-General Report for 2012.

Ambrin then said department chiefs should act quickly on incompetence, while saying that greater care should be taken to prevent wastages of public funds.

“It is crucial for the department and agency heads to look into the competencies of the personnel handling public moneys. Firmer and faster actions should also be taken to deter the wrong doers.

“The personnel themselves should do their work more carefully and diligently to ensure no leakages occurred. There should also be better communication and coordination among the Government departments and agencies,” he said.

But Ambrin, now into his fifth-term helming the audit office, also noted that Putrajaya had considerably improved in its financial management, with those achieving excellent marks in the Accountability Index jumping from 10 in 2007 to 131 this year.

“Over the years, I noticed that the preparation of the financial statements and compliance with financial management procedures under the Accountability Index (AI) have made a good progress. Only a few agencies received adverse audit certificates on the financial statements.

“Based on the AI ratings, the number of auditees obtaining 4-star (excellent marks) has remarkably increased from 10 ministries, departments or agencies in 2007 to 131 recipients this year,” he said.

The AI, which was introduced by the National Audit Department in 2007, is meant to help address the repeated weaknesses found in the annual A-G reports.

The index — which covers areas such as budgetary control, expenditure control and management of assets and inventory — measures the performance of government bodies, ministries and departments in managing public funds.

In the same email reply, Ambrin was also asked for suggestions to tackle the repeated irregularities and mismanagement discovered year after year by the National Audit Department.

“In our view, the way forward in alleviating the recurring issues in our Audit Report is to address the basic issues of Attitude, Knowledge and Skill as well as Integrity of Government servants who managed Government programmes, activities and projects,” he said.

He cited as examples the need for greater competency, efficiency and diligence of civil servants in areas such as enforcing contracts; supervising contractors and consultants; and ensuring the best deal in government procurements.

“With respect to our recommendations, it is left to the department/agency heads to act on them expeditiously. They should be proactive in initiating the necessary corrective or punitive actions as expected of them by the public,” he added.

When asked about the limitations or obstacles that the National Audit Department faces, Ambrin said that the civil service had shown great cooperation during the audit, while saying that the national audit report would still be useful as a guide despite being based on a sampling of government agencies.

“Generally, we do not face any major obstacles and our auditees have been very cooperative.

“However, as has been practised internationally, our auditing is done on a sampling basis and therefore it does not represent a complete picture of the public delivery system. But our audit findings can and should be used as a guide for government servants to improve generally their work performance and productivity,” Ambrin said.