

Thursday January 19, 2006

Make A-G a political appointee

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Attorney-General (A-G) should have ministerial rank so that he is answerable to the public and Parliament and be more responsive to issues of public interest. This was suggested by Public Accounts Committee (PAC) chairman Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad who said it was perhaps time to consider making the A-G a political appointee. He said this in reference to the A-G's statement that he could only act on the alleged misappropriation by Tan Sri Halim Saad and Datuk Anuar Othman of RM32.5mil involving toll operator Metramac Corporation Sdn Bhd once the police have investigated the case.

"The A-G can be an MP or a senator. We used to have this practice and the A-G was more answerable to the public and Parliament," Shahrir said after chairing the PAC meeting yesterday. On Thursday, Court of Appeal judges Datuk Gopal Sri Ram, Datuk Hashim Yusoff and Datuk Zulkefli Ahmad Makinuddin in their judgment ordered Metramac to pay about RM65mil to Fawziah Holdings in compensation for loss of advertising rights. Former finance minister Tun Daim Zainuddin was also implicated as the two were said to be under his patronage. On whether the PAC would probe the case, Shahrir said it was better for the Government to investigate the issue as brought up by the judges and if necessary, to bring to court those who were said to have committed criminal breach of trust.

"Then the three will have a chance to defend themselves as it is only fair." On the meeting, which discussed the PAC's structure with the aim of making it more efficient, he said: "We decided our meetings should not be closed but not too open either or else witnesses will be worried about what they say." The PAC would also conduct more frequent meetings to discuss "issues of public interest," he said, adding that it would convene its meetings even during the Parliament sitting. The PAC also aims to come up with reports to be tabled in Parliament at least twice a year. "We want to make it our practice to immediately act on the Auditor-General's report as soon as it is tabled in Parliament," he said. "A day after the Auditor-General tables the report he will brief us so that we can identify issues to take up."