



Tuesday October 2, 2007

PJ City Council's accounts are in order

By K.W. MAK

THE Petaling Jaya City Council's (MBPJ) account has been approved for the third consecutive year by the Auditor General. PJ mayor Mohamad Roslan Sakiman said the council's audited accounts were sent to the AG's office in June and the approval was given on Aug 19. MBPJ accounts department director Sa'diyah Khasiman said the council has managed to decrease its arrears to RM42 mil by the end of 2006 and expects to further reduce the amount to RM30mil by the end of 2007. The arrears owed to MBPJ were listed as RM50.6mil on Feb 28, 2006.

"We have been given the directive by the state government to reduce our arrears and the target to collect monies owed to us is 90% rate for current due payments and 70% for arrears from previous years," said Sa'diyah. On another matter, MBPJ has given Alam Flora the package to clean up bills and stickers that are increasingly being used to deface public property.

Mohamad Roslan did not mention the cost for the new package but said it was all part of the cost to clean drains and public areas under the jurisdiction of the council. "The cleaning of these stickers will only begin in November as Alam Flora is currently working out again the zone coverage for each area," he said.

MBPJ enforcement department assistant director Mohd Fauzi Maarop said council officers could only slap a fine of RM250 to those caught putting up the bills. "We tried going after the advertiser, but the stickers contain no addresses," he said, referring to the stickers that advertised mostly money lending services.

Mohd Fauzi said the enforcement team tried calling 10 different numbers but could not trace the person or the office the companies were operating from.



Wednesday October 3, 2007

Please check on cost of watchtowers

I REFER to "Samy: Motorcyclists may be banned from expressways" (*The Star Online*, Oct 1).

We are still reeling from the Auditor-General's report showcasing inappropriate spending of public funds, and now we have the Works Minister himself announcing the building of 16 watchtowers for the Police at a cost of RM1mil (which amounts to RM62,500 each).

I think even a low- to medium-cost landed house with all the amenities would cost less, depending on where it is situated. I would also imagine that the observation towers are on government reserve land located in out of town areas.

Can an appropriate agency (not JKR of course) please investigate the cost?

Perhaps it can also come up with a breakdown of the cost of maintenance (its nature and for how long and how often) for the information of the public. The Works Minister also said that motorists must make sure they slow down at least 3km to 4km near the towers. Aren't we are supposed to drive at the required speed at all times and not out of fear of the observation towers?

CKH,

Bukit Mertajam, Penang.



Sunday October 7, 2007

Civil service dancing to the same old tune

BY HARIATI AZIZAN

THE Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has found a "lack of financial discipline" among government officers involved in financial management. Describing their accounting procedures as unsatisfactory, the PAC recommended tighter control over the expenditure of ministries and government departments. This, as some may have already guessed, was lifted from an old PAC report – a 1994 report on the Federal Government Accounts. This has been the familiar tune where government audit is concerned, as recent weeks have shown. And more than a decade on, the civil service still appears to be inflicted by the same "indiscipline", prompting the current PAC to conduct similar investigations. On Friday, a meeting was held with one of the highlighted "culprits" – the first of many in PAC's plan – the Youth and Sports Ministry. The ministry was alleged to have spent RM8.39mil on equipment for its National Youth Skills institutes.

Among the "interesting" items bought at jacked-up prices that were highlighted by the media were a set of four screwdrivers costing RM224 (compared to RM40 market price), RM1,146.56 technical pen set (market price: RM160) and two tower cranes priced at RM5.72mil (market price: RM2.98mil). Represented by a seven-man contingent headed by its secretary-general Datuk Mohd Yassin Mohd Salleh, the ministry presented evidence to explain the reason for the overspending. Said PAC chairman Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad, the meeting showed the excess cost incurred by the construction of the National Youth Skills Training Institute (IKBN) and the supply of equipment was due to the ministry's practice of direct negotiations. "There was no sufficient monitoring by the ministry (Youth and Sports) and the Finance Ministry," Shahrir said, which led to excess spending.

Direct negotiation

In the future, he added, to avoid problems such as financial irregularities arising from the poor monitoring of projects, the number of government contracts being awarded through direct negotiations should be reduced except for those requiring specific expertise. "The direct negotiation approach should only be conducted when the number of people who are able to implement a particular project is limited. Why do we need to resort to direct negotiations when many parties (contractors) can do it? "This is akin to first come first served or whom you know matters. We must avoid this sort of thing as it conveys negative vibes. By limiting the number of projects awarded via direct negotiations, the contractors, suppliers and our

businessmen will be more professional. "And this is how Malaysia can become more competitive," he told reporters after chairing the meeting.

He added that the PAC would ask the Finance Ministry to reveal the list of projects awarded through direct negotiations under the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP). The PAC also urged the Auditor General's Department and Finance Ministry's monitoring and control division to form internal audit committees for all projects awarded on a direct negotiation basis. Shahrir said the Finance Ministry should think of a mechanism to determine reasonable profit margins for companies providing supplies and services to the Government. In the meantime, the PAC will hold briefings with all other ministries that were cited in the report. The PAC also supported the recommended punitive crime punishment for civil servants who waste public funds when implementing projects. This is provided for under the Financial Procedures Act 1957, he said, which stipulated that a surcharge could be imposed on government officers found responsible for any improper payment of public money.

"It is thus important for officers to protect themselves in such direct negotiations," he said. "We want officers to be accountable and responsible for actions and decisions." However, PAC vice-chairman Dr Tan Seng Giaw conceded that although the PAC could haul up anyone, including ministers, to explain any irregularities after the AG has presented his report, nothing much can be done. "If they (the departments) can escape, they will," said the DAP Member of Parliament. "The PAC is as effective as the chairman. But his hands and feet are tied whether he likes it or not," said Tan, who feels that PAC should be led by an opposition MP, as is the case in Britain and India, for it to be more effective.

Check and balance

Recent history indicates that this might just be true; for example, in 2000, most of the recommendations made by the PAC were not acted on due to a lack of will and a proper follow-up mechanism.

Shahrir, however, believes that the public should be happy that there is some sort of check and balance mechanism in place.

"The PAC is as good as all its members. The auditor-general's report is published year in and year out but it gets attention only when it is treated like a big thing in the media. It is to the credit of the Government to have a check and balance mechanism in the system, especially to monitor financial management issues," he said.

The PAC, he assured, would continue investigations into the allegations and pass on the evidence to the relevant agencies, such as the Anti Corruption Agency, if there is any proof of crime.



Sunday October 7, 2007

Mammoth task, little impact

By JOSEPH LOH and RASHVINJEET S.BEDI

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So much work goes into the process of auditing government agencies. Yet, after the Auditor-General's annual report is published, the public outcry over the mismanagement of funds overshadows the rather pathetic follow-up.

WHEN audit officers with Auditor-General's (AG) department call on a government agency, no one stands in their way. In fact, getting compliance to conduct audit work is easy. The reason for this is that the AG's duties are mandated by law under the Audit Act 1957 and preventing audit officers from carrying out their duties is an offence. "People understand what the department has to do, and the only people who fear or dislike them are the ones who have something to hide," says former deputy AG L.T. Kulasingam.

"Officers can walk in anytime as they all carry authority cards. However, surprise checks are rarely done; such checks would only involve centres that handle a lot of cash," he adds. Explaining the depth and breadth of the AG's department's scope of work, he says they examine the accounts of the Government, and review a wide range of activities and projects which are of public interest.

Two levels of audit

All the work leading up to the preparation of the annual AG's report is huge. The department's scope and nature of work involves auditing numerous ministries, departments, statutory bodies, and many other agencies that make up the Government, down to district levels. "The task is immense. Not only is there geographical spread, but factors like volume, dispersion and the various types of activities are examined. It is a whole gamut of things – records, people, projects, contracts transactions, accounts, so the task is very large, varied and fraught with problems."

Kulasingam explains that the audit is done at two levels – in terms of financial and compliance and the other, performance. For the former aspect, it examines all accounts, systems and processes, procedures, and compliance with the laws, rules and regulations. This will cover all manner of

transactions, expenditure, revenue, payrolls, inventories, and so on. Given the enormity of financial records, it uses statistical sampling methods, which examines a low percentage of the population but provides a high percentage of assurance.

Additionally, it also does judgemental sampling, which basically looks at high-risk areas, delayed and failed projects, waste and extravagance, and matters of primary concern in the public interest – the now-scrapped second link bridge with Singapore, for example.

Planning process

To carry out this task requires thorough planning, just like in any other private corporation. "Before an audit is carried out, a great deal of planning is involved. We have to select from a wide range of priorities and high-risk areas. For each audit, audit programmes are developed. The department also develops an Annual Audit Plan and a Long Term Audit Plan for all audit activities," he says. Given the thoroughness of the report and the many irregularities it uncovers, the question that arises is the subsequent action taken as a result of its findings.

"Before anything goes into the report, it is sent to the departments and the ministry it falls under for a response. Nothing gets into the report without the relevant ministry or department's response. If there is a disagreement, both the audit finding and the response are included in the report. This balanced reporting will enable the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to make a decision when deliberating the report." Kulasingam remarks that the report does not have to be published before any action is taken. The moment the irregularity is uncovered – sometimes months before the report is published – it is communicated to the head of department and the ministry concerned, and he believes that action should have been taken immediately.

"If there is fraud and criminal intent is proven, it is the duty of the controlling officer to report to the police." As for the report itself, it appears that there is a definitive course of action that can, and has to be taken to ensure the effectiveness of the report. Yeo Yang Poh, immediate past president of the Malaysian Bar council, believes that the report should be thoroughly studied by the Government, police as well as the Anti Corruption Agency (ACA) so that they can take different angles of investigation simultaneously.

He does not discount the value of the report, but questions the lack of action taken on its findings. "We are fortunate that we have an independent and professional AG's department that does the job and puts on record irregularities they discover – that has value, but lacks effectiveness," adds Yeo. "These are public funds and it concerns people who are administering the public trust, and that trust has been breached.

Impartial probe

"It is a question of a lack of accountability in a consistent and major way. Accountability can only be accurately determined after a thorough and impartial investigation." He adds that the same improprieties are happening every year. Some action is taken in a smaller form, that of internal or smaller cases, but to his knowledge, there has been no meaningful or major action taken against any party.

If similar discrepancies were found of an accounting or law firm, it would have been suspended or some form of action taken against it. Gursharan Singh, a retired audit officer who worked with the Government for more than 30 years, says that many government departments and ministries send their lower ranking officials to answer the questions if hauled up. PAC vice-chairman Dr Tan Seng Giaw however, disagrees. "They have to send their director-general or secretary-general. There is no other way. We have sent a few people back before." Unfortunately, not much more transpires beyond the PAC query.

Short memory

"Sadly, the public has a short memory and only makes noise when the problems are highlighted in the media. Someone should give a status report on what's going on," says Gursharan. He cites the example of the British PAC which makes public their proceedings on the Internet. (www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmpublicacc.htm)

Here, anyone can browse documents of the PAC with the most recently published document at the top of each section. It's a shame when so much work comes practically to nought when those responsible for mismanagement get away scot free. Transparency International Malaysia president Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam makes a valid point. "This is the fundamental difference between the public and private sectors. A CEO must show results in terms of profits, but in Government, there is no profitability so there is no priority. You only need to show that you are spending, but not how you spend it."

"After some time, this leads to a lack of accountability and transparency because hardly anyone is penalised," he says.



Sunday October 7, 2007

Abuse of public funds highlighted

KUALA LUMPUR: The Auditor-General's report was once again highlighted during the Gerakan National Delegates Conference 2007, with delegates saying that such abuse of funds and corruption had to stop if the public were to continue to have confidence in Barisan Nasional.

Perak delegate Cheng Teng Woh was the first delegate to broach the issue and said the people were worried and uncomfortable with what was reported, especially since it happened every year.

"When will these kind of things end? And when will officers who are not ethical improve? What happens to the report if no action is taken by the Government?"

Cheng said the concern was how much of the RM15bil allocated for the Ninth Malaysia Plan would disappear due to abuse of funds.

"Transparency and accountability of officers need to be improved. The abuse has to stop and be reported to the police and Anti-Corruption Agency."

Youth delegate Paul Yong put it more bluntly by saying, "All officers involved in corruption must be fired."

"There was a lot of money wasted. The Government paid 10 times more than the market price for some items."

"If we want to say it frankly, it is corruption. But what is the Government's action? Where are the promises that were made in 2004?"



Sunday October 7, 2007

Gerakan: Form BN panels to discuss prickly issues

KUALA LUMPUR: Gerakan has proposed that Barisan Nasional forms committees at the national, state and district levels to discuss important issues, especially relating to religion, culture and ethnic relations. Acting president Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said the committees would be able to achieve better understanding and coordination in these various areas of concern. He said the committees could involve party leaders and elected representatives who were not holding any government positions.

"Such a consultation model can later be expanded to include leaders from the private sector and non-governmental organisations. "The results of such consultations can be channelled to the Government and the Barisan supreme council and state committees," said Dr Koh in his speech at the party's National Delegates Conference here yesterday. He said although Barisan component leaders met very often in Cabinet, state executive councils, and municipal and district councils, the leaders were usually busy with implementing projects, solving urgent problems and the development process.

"Issues that are important and can cause tension but not time-sensitive can be discussed at length in the committees," he said. On integrity, Dr Koh said the recent revelations by the Auditor-General's report reflected more transparency by the Government. He said the party supported the objectives in the National Integrity Plan and urged the Government to take more concrete action to conduct full and independent investigations against those involved in misusing public funds.

Later in a press conference, Dr Koh said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's opening speech was very clear, strong and inspiring, as the Prime Minister reiterated his full commitment in leading all Barisan component parties to cooperate.

He said Abdullah also stressed that the views of all quarters must be heard.

"What's more inspiring is that he wants us to tell him the truth, and he, as the Prime Minister, is ready to listen to advice and criticism," he said.



Friday October 12, 2007

Action against those implicated in AG's report

By DEVID RAJAH

PUTRAJAYA: Government officers and staff investigated for corruption and mismanagement of public funds under the 2006 Auditor-General's (AG) report will either be charged in court soon or face disciplinary action. Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan, told a media briefing yesterday that the Government would use a three-pronged approach to rectify problems highlighted under the AG's report.

"If it involves corruption and there is clear evidence, the ACA will charge those responsible, and you can expect this to happen very soon. "If there are clear abuses but the case lacks evidence, disciplinary action will be taken against them," he said.

The disciplinary action could be in the form of demotions and dismissals. Mohd Sidek said the Government would also make public the type of disciplinary action taken against civil servants for various offences, other than the impending action against those implicated over the AG's report.

He said the Public Service Department would come out with a "demotion and disciplined" list every quarter so that the people would know that action had been taken. "We have acted against many officers and staff members. Even directors-general, secretaries-general and super scale A officers have been demoted or moved out or opted for early retirement. "If they don't want to perform, they will be encouraged to leave the service.

"At the same time, the Government has been rewarding hardworking and honest officers," he said. The AG's report highlighted the National Youth Skills Institute (under the Youth and Sports Ministry) project where a car jack that cost RM50 was bought for RM5,700, a digital camera that cost RM2,990 was bought for RM8,254 and RM1,146 was paid for a set of technical pens with a market price of RM160.

The ministry was alleged to have spent RM8.39mil on equipment for its National Youth Skills Institutes. The others include the purchase of two helicopters worth RM117.75 million by the police air wing, which could not be used, as they did not meet specifications. Another RM15.4mil was spent to train pilots to fly these helicopters.

The Customs Department meanwhile under-utilised its RM290mil information technology system but was planning to spend another RM451.30mil to develop a new one. It is learnt the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) has completed its investigations into the abuses highlighted by the AG.

ACA director-general Datuk Ahmad Said Hamdan is said to have briefed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Sidek on the matter. Mohd Sidek added that the Government had also directed the departments and ministries to reply to the points highlighted by the AG and their answer "had better be credible."



Monday October 15, 2007

Let's keep them honest

TI-MALAYSIA strongly supports Chief Secretary Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan's statement that firm action, including court action and/or disciplinary action, will be taken against the government officers responsible for malpractices and corrupt practices as highlighted in the Auditor-General's 2006 Report and other reports and investigations.

We believe that the Government should fully explain to the rakyat the measures taken to ensure that there is accountability and prudent management of tax revenue. A strong message must go out to all concerned that the Government will brook no corrupt practices and mismanagement. The rules of ethical behaviour should be practised and upheld. The objectives of the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and the Clients' Charter must be met.

We note the many positive measures recommended by review bodies such as Pemudah and ask that these good recommendations be fully implemented without delay. It is encouraging to note that the ACA had invoked Section 32 of the Anti-corruption Act and taken action in a recent case of a lawyer alleged to have committed malpractices. We hope this provision will be used more often as an effective measure against civil servants who had amassed wealth beyond their means.

Tan Sri Sidek's present initiative could well be a special Hari Raya gift to the rakyat including the 1.2 million civil servants because if these measures prove effective, they will improve public confidence, and bolster the self-respect of the entire civil service at this festive time of the year. We hope these new initiatives will bring about a new era in the fight against corruption. TI-Malaysia will continue to support the Government's noble fight against corruption and will continue to collaborate closely with agencies such as the ACA and IIM in the quest to build a corrupt-free Malaysia.

**Tan Sri (Dr) Ramon V. Navaratnam,
President,
Transparency International Malaysia.**



Tuesday October 16, 2007

Cuepacs against 'name and shame' move

CUEPACS is against the move to publicise the names of government servants who flout rules when discharging their duties, *Tamil Nesan* reported. Quoting Cuepacs president Omar Osman, the report said any such incident could be handled in a more professional manner within the organisation. This, he said, would safeguard the image of the civil service. He was commenting on the action to be taken against civil servants in the recently publicised wastage of funds in last year's Auditor-General's Report.

Omar said although revealing the names of the errant civil servants might be good as far as highlighting their negligence and mistakes were concerned, it would affect the image and morale of the civil service. He said transferring and downgrading of a number of errant civil servants had already affected the service's image and performance. Omar said Cuepacs always protected the interest and welfare of its members and when unfavourable matters were exposed, it would question and discuss it at all levels.

High profile trans-national crimes

Tamil Nesan reported that the Malaysian Interpol which is based at the federal police headquarters in Bukit Aman has been instrumental in solving several high profile trans-national crimes over the years. It said it has scored many successes in helping solve murders in Canada, Cambodia and Singapore; drug trafficking and kidnapping cases in the United States; prostitution and human trafficking cases in Canada; and cheating in Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore.

ASP Nor Omar Sappi, acting head of Malaysia Interpol, said the division worked with more than 200 similar divisions in other countries. He said that Malaysia Interpol had helped foreign police organisations solve eight criminal cases, which took place abroad last year.

□ *Other News & Views is compiled from the vernacular newspapers (Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese and Tamil dailies). As such, stories are grouped according to the respective language/medium. Where a paragraph begins with a sub-heading, it denotes a separate news item.*



Friday October 19, 2007

Questions linger over PKFZ

PORT KLANG: The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) wants to know the final cost of the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) and how the provisional cost of RM560mil will be spent, since the project is almost completed. PAC chairman Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad said the committee was seeking explanations from the Port Klang Authority and PKFZ on the RM2.8bil development cost, including 20% of the provisional cost. "It (PKFZ) is practically ready now except for the hotel, exhibition centre and the main access road due to be done by the end of this year. "How much of the provisional cost does it needs? We want to know the actual development cost," he said.

Shahrir said he hoped to get the answers from the authorities concerned by the end of the year, when the project would be completed. After visiting and being briefed on the project at the PKFZ site yesterday, he said there were many questions still unanswered. "Now we have confirmed the project's existence, but we still have questions on the project," he said after a two-hour site tour and briefing by PKFZ business development general manger Chia Kon Leong.

Also present were six MPs and Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang.

When asked if he was satisfied with the visit and the explanation by PKFZ, Shahrir said: "As far as the project is concern, we are satisfied, but are not finished with the PKFZ yet. "We have one more meeting with the Attorney-General's Chambers, only then will we decide if there are other areas of inquiry we have proceed with."

Other questions PAC were focusing on were land price and execution of the project, he said. The PAC first met on Sept 6 to discuss the PKFZ issue. Its aim is to determine how the PKFZ project came up to RM4.7bil in all, and also the issuance of bonds worth RM4.6bil by the Securities Commission for a soft loan for the project.



Thursday October 18, 2007

PAC still has questions on PKFZ

By Christina Tan

PORT KLANG: The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) wants to know the final cost of the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) and how the provisional cost of RM560mil will be spent, since the project is almost completed. PAC chairman Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad said the committee was seeking explanations from the Port Klang Authority and PKFZ on the RM2.8bil development cost, including 20% of the provisional cost. "It (PKFZ) is practically ready now except for the hotel, exhibition centre and the main access road due to be done by the end of this year, how much of the provisional cost does it needs? We want to know the actual development cost," he said.

Shahrir said he hoped to get the answers from the authorities concerned by year's end, when the project would be completed. After visiting and being briefed on the project at the PKFZ site Thursday, he said there were many questions still unanswered. "Now we have confirmed the project's existence, but we still have questions on the project," he said after a two-hour site tour and briefing by PKFZ business development general manger Chia Kon Leong.

Also present were six MPs and Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang.

When asked if he was satisfied with the visit and the explanation by PKFZ, Shahrir said: "As far as the project is concern, we are satisfied, but are not finished with the PKFZ yet. "We have one more meeting with the Attorney-General's Chambers, only then will we decide if there are other areas of inquiry we have proceed with." Shahrir said the PAC was still waiting for a suitable date to meet with the Attorney-General to get legal opinion on the decision made by the Transport Ministry and Port Klang Authority to buy the land for PKFZ instead of acquiring it through established means.

Other questions PAC were focusing on were land price and execution of the project, he said. "We are not anti-development, we just don't want to see any party taking advantage of the situation or any misconduct. "We support the government's programme because we are also part of the system but we cannot condone corruption, over expenditure and decisions not made according to procedure," he added.

The PAC first met on Sept 6 to discuss the PKFZ issue. Its aim is to determine how the PKFZ project came up to RM4.7bil in all, and also the issuance of bonds worth RM4.6bil by the Securities Commission for a soft loan for the project.



Saturday October 20, 2007

ACA to act against those implicated in A-G's report

By LOURDES CHARLES

PUTRAJAYA: The Anti-Corruption Agency is wrapping up its investigations into questionable dealings involving several senior officials highlighted in the Auditor-General's (A-G) report recently. The officials, believed to be from at least two ministries, were said to have bought equipment that were "overly priced", causing the Government losses of millions of ringgit.

The ACA is believed to have questioned several officials before the Hari Raya holidays and is expected to either charge them in court or recommend serious disciplinary action. ACA director-general Datuk Ahmad Said Hamdan confirmed that investigations were nearing completion and that action would be taken against several people.

He declined to elaborate further. Sources familiar with the investigations said they were centred on three aspects. One was on whether government officers had received bribes from parties in the private sector. "The ACA is also investigating if anyone had made false claims and also if those who had been recorded as having received money had actually received it.

"The investigation will also ascertain if the number of items supplied to the government department or agency concerned matched the numbers ordered," the sources added. They said the ACA task force investigating the A-G's report were checking the background of the companies from which the goods were bought from, and those which had contracts with government bodies or projects awarded.

They will investigate if there were any abuse of power by anyone, especially in the purchase or the awarding of contracts. The sources said the ACA wanted to know if any of the goods bought or contracts awarded concerned the decision maker's family members, relatives or proxies. Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang, in his 2006 report, revealed a slew of cases involving public fund mismanagement such as paying RM1,146 for a set of pens costing RM160, and forking out RM5,700 for a car jack worth RM50.

Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan had said that civil servants found negligent in their duties or had committed irregularities would be dealt with. He said the Government took a serious view of the offences and would not allow the actions of a few to tarnish the image of the civil service.



Sunday October 21, 2007

Act tougher against errant senior officials

Sunday Star Says

THE Anti-Corruption Agency is understood to be finalising investigations involving some senior government officials in at least two ministries, as mentioned in the recent Auditor-General's report.

Once more, it is disappointing that more public officials have been implicated in issues of graft. However, conscientious work by the ACA should make up for some loss in confidence, esteem and morale that charges of corruption inevitably bring. It should not matter that senior officials have been implicated, other than the obvious wastage of human resources implied. All public officials must always be accountable to the public interest, and so long as the ACA conducts its investigations professionally, its findings must be respected and acted upon.

Government officials know what is expected of them in the discharge of their duties. They also know, or at least should know, that their actions must always be above reproach and seen to be so. Anything less or suspect invites and deserves an inquiry. The current investigation concerns the overpricing of equipment purchased, and covers the prospect of conflict of interest in the award of contracts for the purchases. ACA investigations need to look into various related aspects to ascertain the culpability of the individuals concerned.

If the charges are proven against these individuals, justice demands swift and judicious action against them. But if the investigation clears any suspects, their status should also be made clear. ACA actions must always be lawful and ethical at every stage. All proper investigations need to arrive at distinct, unambiguous findings. There should not be any "grey areas" any more than "no go areas", because the ACA must not be impeded in its work. Any attempt to distract or deflect its investigations is itself an offence.

In the process, the seniority of suspected individuals must never be an obstacle to investigations or to sentencing upon conviction. On the contrary, the more senior the public official who is charged and convicted, the more severe the penalty should be. Senior officials are not only expected to understand the consequences of their actions better, they are also held in greater trust and esteem by colleagues and the public. Natural justice requires stronger punitive and deterrent action against their wrongdoing.



Sunday October 21, 2007

Let's book the culprits

On The Beat

By WONG CHUN WAI

Those highlighted in the A-G's report for mismanagement of funds, if found guilty by the ACA, should be penalised, not merely transferred to another desk. Taxpayers want to see real punitive action.

JUST before the long Hari Raya break began last week, the word in Putrajaya was that the Anti-Corruption Agency would pick up several government officials once the celebrations are over. By tomorrow, the majority of these officials would be back to work. The ACA said it had finalised its investigations into questionable deals involving officials highlighted in the Auditor-General's report recently. So, can Malaysian taxpayers see some arrests this week or the subsequent weeks now that the holidays are over?

It has been reported that the officials being investigated were from at least two ministries said to have bought equipment that were "overly priced", causing the government losses of millions of ringgit. Malaysians would certainly like to see the culprits hauled to court as we are fed up with the mismanagement of public funds. We taxpayers would certainly like to know the person or persons responsible for using our money to pay RM224 for a RM32 set of screwdrivers.

Let's also see the faces of those who approved RM1,146 for a set of pens costing RM160 and RM5,700 for a car jack worth RM50, as outlined in the 2006 A-G's report. The Government also paid RM8.36mil more than the market price to buy items, including technical books, for the National Youth Skills Institutes. Two helicopters worth RM117.76mil purchased by the police air wing could not be used as they did not meet specifications, yet another RM15.4mil was spent to train pilots to fly these helicopters. The Customs Department under-utilised its RM290mil information technology system but was planning to spend another RM451.30mil on a new system.

Trail of abuse

Surely there must be a trail that reveals misdeeds that the ACA can track and book these culprits. It has been reported that the ACA probe would be centred on three aspects. One was whether government officers had received bribes from parties in the private sector. The agency was also investigating if anyone had made false claims and also if those who had been recorded as having received money had actually received it.

The investigation, it was reported, would also ascertain if the number of items supplied to the government department or agency concerned matched the numbers ordered. We understand and appreciate the necessity of the ACA to cover their tracks to ensure a solid case against the offenders but we hope there will be quick action against those responsible. It would also be meaningless if only the *ikan bilis* or small fries are arrested in this exercise. The ministries should at least apologise for these fiascos if the senior officials who once headed these ministries have been transferred to other agencies or bodies.

The refusal to take responsibility seems to be an ugly culture of some of our senior officers, who prefer to maintain their silence in the hope that such controversies would blow over once the media lose interest. Not many senior officials have resigned for their failures, unlike those in Japan, despite Malaysia having adopted the Look East policy for over 20 years. It doesn't help that among civil servants, some perceive that their political masters are not clean and had probably made more on the take.

But Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has sent word down that civil servants who waste public funds should be punished and, if there are elements of corruption, they should be charged. He has told his listeners, including editors, that he encouraged media reports highlighting such abuses and wanted action taken. It has been a double-edged sword for Pak Lah as such openness has caused much uneasiness among the powerful and influential, who are not used to such scrutiny from the top. While there have been similar A-G reports in the past, the standard practice of leaving it to the ACA to probe has shown little, if any, results.

Dented image

The opposition has also used the A-G reports to hit out at the leadership and, as a result, has dented the leadership's image. Certainly there would be a political price, especially in urban areas, during the elections.

But without doubt, Pak Lah is determined to go after those who do not practise good governance in government. For a start, the ministries and agencies must improve their internal audit systems of checks and balances. They must learn to have more efficient controls on financial expenditures as they need to realise that the A-G would eventually catch up on them. A strong message from the leadership that those who foul up would be punished should help inculcate such a working culture. Certainly there should be preventive action but the public rightly wants to see punitive action too.

It is no good merely transferring offenders, particularly those suspected of graft, to another section or other agencies. A few years back, a complaint was made against a Customs officer who asked for money without issuing a receipt and, although the case was highlighted by the media, the person was merely transferred to another desk.

Malaysians want to see action and offenders penalised. That's surely fair.



Monday October 22, 2007

Pointless not to punish the guilty

WONG Chun Wai's call for stern action on those guilty of mismanagement of public funds, '[Let's book the culprits](#)' (*Sunday Star*, Oct 21), as disclosed in the Auditor-General's Report, is a clear call on behalf of the rakyat.

Common citizens would always remain puzzled if such reported irregularities are not followed up by appropriate and equitable punishment.

We hear of mothers, who stole some supermarket merchandise to feed her hungry children, being sent to jail. And many residents of prisons are petty thieves compared to people who inflate the price of a screwdriver from RM32 to RM224 or who purchase a RM50 car jack for an astronomic price of RM5,700.

The action by the ACA certainly reinforces the hope of the rakyat that the Government is doing something to clean up the system. It also sends the message that people in power should be more careful and responsible when discharging their duties.

The Prime Minister has often called for high moral standards among the people. If we continue to have disappointing examples among people who are responsible over public funds, we certainly cannot expect to induce good values in the people.

Stern actions have to be taken to deter the recurrence of such conduct, and to restore the confidence of the people.

I support Wong's call that action has to be taken, as the amounts involved are very much more than the price of a can of milk. And more so, as it involves the rakyat's funds entrusted to public servants.

**KAY ARR,
Petaling Jaya.**



Tuesday October 23, 2007

ACA nabs five

By LOURDES CHARLES

PETALING JAYA: Five people, three of whom are senior officers of two ministries, have been detained for alleged corrupt practices in cases highlighted in the [2006 Auditor-General's Report](#).

Two of the officers are from the Youth and Sports Ministry – one of them is now a director in the ministry. The other officer is with the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry. Also arrested were a consultant and a supplier who allegedly brokered and supplied the items to the Youth and Sports Ministry. Anti-Corruption Agency officers, who arrested four of them at the ACA office in Kuala Lumpur and the fifth in Raub, Pahang, yesterday, are expected to pick up more people for questioning.

It is learnt that four of those arrested would be charged at the Kota Baru Sessions Court today with making false claims under Section 11 (C) of the Anti-Corruption Act. The other person is expected to be charged at the Raub Sessions Court with criminal breach of trust.

It is possible that Attorney-General Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail would also charge them under the Anti-Money Laundering Act. ACA director-general Datuk Ahmad Said Hamdan, who confirmed the arrests, is expected to hold a press conference today, providing details of the investigations. It is believed this is the first time that the ACA has acted on the Auditor-General's Report.

Sources said Ahmad Said ordered a thorough investigation into the matter after he and his deputy Datuk Abu Kassim Mohamed studied the A-G's Report. On Saturday, *The Star* reported that the ACA had wrapped up its investigations and would make several arrests.

The sources said the ACA investigations centred on whether government officers received bribes from the private sector, if false claims were made and whether those recorded as having received money actually received it.

"The investigation will also ascertain if the items supplied to the department or agency matched the order," the sources added.



Tuesday October 23, 2007

ACA suggests corruption clause in letters

By NIK MAZWIN NIK ANIS and SIM LEOI LEOI

PUTRAJAYA: The Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) will recommend that a preventive clause warning against corruption be inserted in all government offer and tender letters, contracts and agreements in the future.

This recommendation - along with several others to plug weaknesses in the ministries' financial procedures, including the blacklisting of companies found to have offered bribes - will serve to remind all signatories of such contracts the criminality of the act.

These measures are suggested as the agency announced its findings on its probes into the cases highlighted in the Auditor-General's Report 2006, which saw 10 people being charged for various corruption offences and at least five senior civil servants to have disciplinary action taken against them.

ACA director-general Datuk Ahmad Said Hamdan said many signatories in fact actually did not know that corruption or any such malpractice constituted a criminal act. "They may think it is unethical but not criminal in nature. The clause will remind anyone conducting business with the Government of this and that action can thus be taken against them under the Anti-Corruption Act 1997.

"If there is any element of corruption, it is suggested that these contracts be terminated immediately. At present, there is no such clause in any government contract or tender. "We have inserted such a clause for the giving of aid under the tsunami relief aid in Penang and we have found it to be effective," he told reporters at his office here Tuesday. Under the Act, one can be liable for a maximum 20 years' imprisonment term or a RM10,000 minimum fine or five times that of the amount involved.

Besides this, the ACA, he added, would also suggest to the Government that a comprehensive study be carried out on the procurement procedures currently practised by ministries and agencies.



Wednesday October 24, 2007

Make public officials accountable

WE refer to the report 'ACA zooms in' (*The Star*, Oct 20) and cannot agree more.

Although the Auditor-General's Report was very comprehensive and detailed, we wondered why no minister or ministries were taking any responsibility. Year-in and year-out, the AG makes his report but nobody at the highest level of government takes responsibility for their ministries? Are they beyond reproach or are they above the law?

When taxpayers' money is wasted and not accounted for, we, as taxpayers, are very disappointed. We have yet to see ministers or their senior officers taking responsibility for things that happen in their ministries. How come?

Any public official found not doing his job either because of incompetence or inappropriate conduct must take responsibility and vacate his position voluntarily. We have yet to see a public officials take responsibility despite the many opportunities to do so.

PHILIP WONG PAK MING,

President,

Sarawak-Sabah Foochow Association, Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur



Wednesday October 24, 2007

Agency: Price of screwdrivers fair, but not others

PUTRAJAYA: The Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) has cleared all parties involved in the procurement of the screwdrivers that were allegedly made at inflated prices by the National Youth Skills Institute (IKBN).

The ACA, however, has detained four people in connection with the purchase of three digital cameras, deemed to be bought at an unreasonable price and not following specifications. The Auditor-General's Report for 2006 cited these items among those bought at inflated prices by the Youth and Sports Ministry for the IKBN.

The Auditor-General said the ministry paid RM8.39mil more than the market price for the items, including RM224 for a set of four screwdrivers (costing RM32 in the market). The ministry also paid RM5.72mil for two crane towers (against the market price of RM2.98mil), technical books comprising 17 titles priced at RM10,700 and three units of 3.1 mega pixel digital camera that were bought at RM8,254 each.

ACA director-general Datuk Ahmad Said Hamdan said the supplier of the Draper screwdrivers took into account that they were imported and came with a guarantee of authenticity and quality. "Our survey from other suppliers showed that Draper screwdrivers, of different sizes, were imported with a guarantee of between RM20 and RM40 for each screwdriver, depending on the currency exchange at the time of purchase.

"The price is thus reasonable, taking into the account the costs of bringing in the screwdrivers and the assurance of quality," he told reporters at his office here yesterday. He said the agency found the price of the screwdrivers reasonable, "considering that these screwdrivers were not those manufactured in China".

"We are scrutinising this case and will submit a report on this to the department involved later," he added. However, said Ahmad Said, there were irregularities involved in the purchase of the technical books, the digital cameras and other items by IKBN.

"For the technical books, the supplier sold the 17 sets at RM10,700 each while the A-G Report indicated the actual price to be RM417 per set. "Our survey showed that books, with those same titles, should cost between RM50 and RM150 each and the entire set should be around RM500 to RM1,500. "The price quoted by the supplier was thus too high and unreasonable, causing the Government to suffer losses," he said. The ACA has detained four people in connection with the camera purchase and was recommending that at least five senior ministry officers face disciplinary action for carrying out their duties without considering the implication on their department and the Government.

ACA checks showed that those involved had gone on overseas trips without permission from the Government and accepted various "entertainments" from the company. "Six others are still under investigation. We are continuing with our probe to prove element of criminality and the case will be referred to the Attorney-General's office," added Ahmad Said.

The A-G's Report has so far led to 10 people being hauled to the courts to face various corruption offences. At least five senior civil servants are facing disciplinary action. The ACA would also ask for a company involved in the renovation of some government quarters in Penang to be blacklisted and a government technician to be penalised for making false declarations.



Wednesday October 24, 2007

ACA wants warning clause

By NIK MAZWIN NIK ANIS and SIM LEOI LEOI

PUTRAJAYA: The Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) wants a clause that warns of the consequences of bribery to be included in all government offer and tender letters, contracts and agreements.

This move along with several others, including blacklisting companies found to have offered bribes, would serve to remind all signatories of such documents of the consequences of corruption.

ACA director-general Datuk Ahmad Said Hamdan said: "If there is any element of corruption, it is suggested that these contracts be terminated immediately. "We have inserted such a clause for the giving of aid under the tsunami relief aid in Penang and we found it to be effective," he told a press conference at his office here yesterday when announcing its probe into the cases highlighted in the Auditor-General's Report 2006.

Ahmad Said said the agency would also suggest to the Government that a study be carried out on the procurement procedures now being practised by ministries and agencies. "The study will hopefully lead to a mechanism for more transparent procedures.

"Our investigations indicated there are weaknesses, which allow opportunities for corruption and mismanagement of funds.

"This was proven by the Auditor-General's report, exposing that many of the purchasing of equipment and items were actually carried out by direct negotiation," he pointed out. In Kuala Lumpur, Transparency International Malaysia president Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam said the rapid action taken by ACA to investigate 10 government officials was a step in the right direction in eradicating corruption.



Wednesday October 24, 2007

Three claim trial to regularities

SEREMBAN: Three men, including a director with a government training institute, pleaded not guilty at the Sessions Court here over alleged irregularities in the purchase of digital cameras for the use of trainees at the National Youth Skills Institute (IKBN) in Chembong, near Rembau. The alleged irregularities were reported in the 2006 Auditor General's report.

Kamaruzaman Md Ali, 38, who is a director with the Industrial Training Institute in Sandakan, allegedly committed the offence on Feb 17, 2003 while he was an assistant director at IKBN Chembong. He was alleged to have deceived the principal at IKBN Chembong into believing that the institute had received the Kodak DC4800 USA digital cameras together with the Windows 2000 software and personal computers which had a minimum 128MB RAM, CD ROM drives for software installation, USB port and 256 colour monitors. Kamaruzaman was accused of signing the final acceptance certificate, which stated that the equipment was bought according to specifications and functioned well. He was represented by Mohamed Khatir Abdullah.

Another former head at the same institute, 31-year-old Wan Asmawi Wan Shariff, 33, was also charged with the same offence. Wan Asmawi, who is now head at the IKBN Temerloh training unit, allegedly abetted Kamaruzaman by signing the document verifying that the IKBN Chembong had received all the equipment according to specifications.

Wan Asmawi, who was then the head at the IKBN Chembong Construction School, was unrepresented. Loh Siu Le, 38, a project manager at Kosijaya Didactics Sdn Bhd, was also charged with abetting the duo by acknowledging the final acceptance certificate they had signed on behalf of his company.

Loh was represented by Ragunath Kesavan. The three, who appeared separately before judge Sabariah Atan, were charged under Section 11(c) of the Anti Corruption Act 1997. If found guilty, they can be jailed between 14 days and 20 years and fined RM10,000 or five times the amount of the bribe, whichever is higher. Sabariah set bail at RM8,000 with one surety each and fixed March 12 for retraction. ACA's Joyce Blasius and Wong Poi Yoke prosecuted.

On Tuesday, Kamaruzaman and Loh claimed trial at the Kota Baru Sessions Court to either signing or abetting in the signing of a final acceptance certificate containing false information on goods delivered to the Bachok IKBN three years ago.

The trial was fixed for mention on Nov 28.



Thursday October 25, 2007

Three charged over skills institute's equipment deal

By SARBAN SINGH

SEREMBAN: Two men and a woman pleaded not guilty in the Sessions Court over alleged irregularities in the purchase of digital cameras for trainees at the National Youth Skills Institute (IKBN) in Chembong, near Rembau.

The irregularities were reported in the 2006 Auditor-General's Report.

Kamaruzaman Md Ali, 38, now a director with the Industrial Training Institute in Sandakan, allegedly committed the offence on Feb 17, 2003 while he was assistant director at the IKBN in Chembong. He was said to have deceived the IKBN Chembong principal into believing that the institute had received the Kodak DC4800 USA digital cameras, Windows 2000 software and 256 personal computers with a minimum 128MB RAM, CD-ROM drives for software installation and USB ports.

Kamaruzaman allegedly signed the final acceptance certificate that stated that the equipment was bought according to specifications and functioned well. A former head of the institute, Wan Asmawi Wan Shariff, 33, was also charged with the same offence.

Wan Asmawi, who is now head of the institute's Temerloh training unit, allegedly abetted Kamaruzaman by signing the same document, verifying that all the equipment had been received according to the specifications.

He was then head of the institute's Chembong Construction School.

Loh Siu Le, 38, project manager at Kosijaya Didactics Sdn Bhd, was charged with abetting the two by acknowledging the final acceptance certificate they had signed. The three appeared separately before judge Sabariah Atan.

The court set bail at RM8,000 with one surety each and fixed March 12 for mention.



Friday October 26, 2007

17 picked up over A-G's report so far, more arrests soon

By LOURDES CHARLES

PUTRAJAYA: The blitz on civil servants and others allegedly involved in the irregularities highlighted in the 2006 Auditor-General's Report continues with four arrests Thursday, and more likely to be picked up soon. On Thursday, the ACA picked up a former director, an assistant director and a technical officer – all from the Youth and Sports Ministry. The fourth person is a contractor. The four arrests have taken to 17 the total number picked up so far.

It is learnt that the former director, now retired, was picked up in Kedah while the assistant director and contractor were picked up in Kuala Lumpur. The technical officer, with the civil engineering department of the ministry, was arrested at the ACA office in Kangar when he went there to give his statement. ACA director-general Datuk Ahmad Said Hamdan confirmed the arrests and said all four are expected to be charged on Friday at the Kangar Sessions Court under Section 11 (C) of the Anti-Corruption Act 1997 with making false claims.

The alleged offences took place in Kuala Perlis. "We will continue with our investigations. If there is any basis for us to arrest and charge anyone for any corrupt practices, we will do it," said Ahmad Said. "There is no such thing as going after only the small fish and letting off the big ones. We do not discriminate when it comes to such matters."

The agency also said it would call in ministers and senior officials for questioning if the need arose. The ACA has so far charged 14 people in Kota Kinabalu, Kelantan, Pahang and Seremban for various offences, including making false claims. It is learnt that at least five senior ministry officers face disciplinary action for carrying out their duties without considering the implication on their department and the Government.

ACA checks showed that those involved had gone on overseas trips without permission from the Government and accepted various types of "entertainment". Ahmad Said was also reported as saying that six others were still under investigation.

The ACA would also ask for a company involved in the renovation of some government quarters in Penang to be blacklisted and a government technician to be penalised for making false declarations.



Wednesday October 24, 2007

Audit teams must be more efficient, says Ambrin

PUTRAJAYA: The internal audit teams in ministries and agencies must be more efficient in monitoring the management of public funds and uncovering abuses, particularly in the procurement process. PUTRAJAYA: The head of the National Audit Department, Tan Sri Ambrin Buang said this had always been his advice to members of the internal audit teams. However, he said the public must also understand that in the management within agencies and ministries, there were too many financial transactions taking place in a day.

"The management of funds may not just occur within one ministry or department, but involves multiple agencies and officers. In fact, what our department has uncovered in our report is merely the results of our survey based on randomly selected agencies. "At present, many of the members of these internal audit teams are already officers from our department. However, from now on, you can expect more professional audits to sit in these teams," he told reporters during the Prime Minister's Department Hari Raya open house celebration here Wednesday.

He was responding to findings announced by the Anti-Corruption Agency on Tuesday in their investigations of the cases highlighted in the Auditor-General's Report 2006. Ten civil servants were charged throughout the country while another five senior officers were expected to face disciplinary action. ACA director-general Datuk Ahmad Said Hamdan also called for a preventive clause to be inserted in all government contracts, tender letters and agreements in the future as well as reviewing the procurement procedures now being practised by ministries and agencies.

Ambrin said he agreed with the ACA for the tightening of such loopholes so that these could not be exploited and for the insertion of the preventive clause. "If such a clause can help reduce abuses, this should be considered by the Government and we should support it," he said. Asked if the public could expect a "better" report for next year, Ambrin said it was still too early to say. "I pray very hard that it will be better in terms of accountability and integrity next year," he said. Later, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan said his office would look into the kind of disciplinary action to be taken against the errant officers under the Public Officers Conduct and Discipline Regulations.

"We will have to wait for a formal report from the ACA on the matter before taking any action against them as we have to be fair," he said.



Friday October 26, 2007

Errant civil servants have to pay, says Chief Sec

By SIM LEOI LEOI

PUTRAJAYA: Civil servants found guilty in the cases highlighted in the recent 2006 Auditor-General's Report may find themselves having to face the wrath of their departments as well.

Aside from having to face imprisonment or fine, they can also be forced to pay restitution to the Government for the amount of funds they had misappropriated from its coffers.

Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan said these errant civil servants could be asked to give back the monies or part of it under the service's regulations.

"They can also be sacked. We don't want and should not tolerate such elements in the public service. The Government wants to be fair to all the civil servants involved but we are very serious in weeding out the errant ones.

"For those who have been charged and are still awaiting trial, they will have their pay cut by half. If, by the end of the process they are not found guilty, the Government will repay the arrears owed to them," he told reporters after launching the *Guidebook on the Employment of Expatriates: Processes and Procedures* at the Prime Minister's office here on Friday.

It is understood that the Treasury will determine the proportion of any restitution that errant civil servants would have to pay back.

Mohd Sidek was commenting on a series of arrests carried out by the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) over the past week based on their investigations into the irregularities highlighted in the AG's report.



Saturday October 27, 2007

Civil servants will have to pay back funds misappropriated

By SIM LEOI LEOI
leoi@thestar.com.my

PUTRAJAYA: Civil servants found guilty in the cases highlighted in the recent Auditor-General's report may have to face the wrath of their departments as well. Besides having to face imprisonment or fine, they could also be forced to pay restitution to the Government for the amount of funds they had misappropriated.

Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan said these errant civil servants could be asked to give back the monies or part of it under the service's regulations. "They can also be sacked. We don't want and should not tolerate such elements in the public service. The Government wants to be fair to all the civil servants involved but we are serious in weeding out the errant ones. "For those who have been charged and are still awaiting their trial, they will have their pay cut by half for now. If they are not found guilty, the Government will repay the arrears owed to them," he told reporters after launching the *Guidebook on the Employment of Expatriates: Processes and Procedures* at the Prime Minister's office here yesterday.

It is understood that the Treasury will determine the restitution that errant civil servants would have to pay. He was commenting on a series of arrests carried out by the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) over the past week following investigations into the irregularities highlighted in the report. So far, the agency has arrested 17 civil servants including senior officers. They have been charged in Kota Kinabalu, Kangar, Seremban and Kelantan for various offences.

The agency had on Monday said that it would also be recommending disciplinary action against at least five officers. Mohd Sidek said the civil service had many regulations governing the management of finances and purchases but that these were not being enforced properly.



Monday October 29, 2007

We've done our part, says A-G

By FARIK ZOLKEPLI

JOHOR BARU: The Audit Dept has done its part in submitting the AG's report and it is now up to the enforcement agencies to take action, says Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang.

"It is not our place to say whether we are satisfied with enforcement efforts based on our yearly reports," said Ambrin.

He said the National Audit Department played its part every year in documenting all spending by government departments and agencies while the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) and other agencies carried out enforcement efforts.

"As far as I am concerned, we played our part in the Auditor-General's report. "It is up to (the other agencies) to act based on the reports. We cannot comment whether the ones investigated are only small fries or otherwise," he said when asked if he felt satisfied with the enforcement efforts.

Ambrin said investigations and enforcement should be carried out whenever there is any mismanagement of public funds.

"It is the expectations of the public to see justice done if there are any wrongdoings.

"Actions based on our reports are needed," he told a press conference after attending the launch of the National Audit Day here, launched by state assembly speaker Datuk Ali Hassan.



Tuesday October 30, 2007

Shahrir: Go after decision-makers, too

ACTION should be taken against those in the decision-making and policy positions who are responsible for the mismanagement of funds highlighted in the Auditor-General's Report for 2006.

Public Accounts Committee chairman Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad said companies which supplied overpriced equipment should also be blacklisted.

He commended Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan for saying that action would be taken against civil servants who were found guilty in such cases, but added that more needs to be done.

"We are not happy. We want decision-makers to be called up and charged as well.

"It is not a question of big fish or small fish. We should go after the decision-makers as well, because those at the institution level were arrested for only accepting supplies that were allegedly not according to specifications.

"We anticipate more arrests at the decision-making and ministry levels," he told reporters at Parliament House after a briefing by officials from the Agriculture and Agro-Based Industries Ministry.

On the companies involved in supplying the products, Shahrir said it was not logical that they were not aware of the price.

"Surely, they must realise that it is a serious offence to supply to the Government equipment that can be bought for 30% to 40% cheaper.

"We can afford to sacrifice 11 companies if there is evidence of misbehaviour. Such companies should be blacklisted. Otherwise, there will be no fear that action can be taken against them," he added.

Shahrir said the PAC was happy that the Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Ministry had responded positively to criticisms in the report.



Tuesday October 30, 2007

Auditor-General: Up to other agencies to act

JOHOR BARU: The National Audit Department's role is to document all malpractices in the Government while other agencies act on them, said Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang.

"It is not our place to say whether we are satisfied with enforcement efforts based on our yearly reports.

"As far as I am concerned, we played our part in the Auditor-General's report. It is up to them (other agencies) to act based on the reports.

"We cannot comment whether the ones investigated are only small fries or otherwise," he said when asked if he was satisfied with actions taken against those found to have mismanaged public funds in the 2006 report.

He was speaking to reporters at the launch of National Audit Day here.

Ambrin said investigations and actions should be carried out in cases of mismanagement of public funds.

"It is the expectation of the public to see justice done if there is any wrongdoing," he added.

Ambrin also said that the Johor Government's debt would be greatly reduced when the Federal Government took over certain projects such as water management.

Asked whether the state government was bankrupt, Ambrin said he had never made such a statement or report.

"The Johor Government and other state governments cannot be bankrupt. They are managing the money owed to the Federal Government."



Tuesday October 30, 2007

I pay dead people ... probe widens

By MUGUNTAN VANAR

KOTA KINABALU: The Anti Corruption Agency has widened its probe into deceased people receiving welfare aid to include more district Welfare offices in the state.

Sabah ACA director Latifah Mohd Yatim said they were investigating the falsification of documents at various district offices.

Five people, mainly administrative staff from Welfare offices in Tuaran and Penampang, were charged on Oct 23 for falsifying documents to claim welfare aid for the elderly.

The investigations came about following the Auditor-General's 2006 report that highlighted the issue in the districts of Kota Belud and Keningau.

"Though we have charged five people, it does not mean the investigations are over -- we are continuing to investigate several other districts," Latifah told reporters at the Sabah ACA Hari Raya gathering here.

She declined to say if more arrests were expected.



Tuesday October 30, 2007

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"It is not our place to say whether we are satisfied with enforcement efforts based on our yearly reports. "As far as I am concerned, we played our part in the Auditor-General's report. It is up to them (other agencies) to act based on the reports. "We cannot comment whether the ones investigated are only small fries or otherwise," he said when asked if he was satisfied with actions taken against those found to have mismanaged public funds in the 2006 report.

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"It is the expectation of the public to see justice done if there is any wrongdoing," he added. Ambrin also said that the Johor Government's debt would be greatly reduced when the Federal Government took over certain projects such as water management.

Asked whether the state government was bankrupt, Ambrin said he had never made such a statement or report. "The Johor Government and other state governments cannot be bankrupt. They are managing the money owed to the Federal Government."



Wednesday October 31, 2007

ACA probes high-priced purchase of OPVs

THE Anti-Corruption Agency is investigating alleged irregularities in the purchase of six Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPV) highlighted in the Auditor-General's Report.

In winding up debates on the 2008 budget for his ministry, Deputy Defence Minister Datuk Zainal Abidin Zin said the contract cost increased by RM1.4bil from RM5.35bil due to several factors.

He said the construction of the six OPVs was delayed last year due to weaknesses in the former contractor, PSC-NDSB Company, a subsidiary of Penang Shipbuilding Corporation Industries.

Lembaga Tabung Angkatan Tentera later took over the contract.

He said there was justification for the increase as the additional RM1.4bil was needed to continue construction of all OPVs.

Among the reasons he gave was that foreign suppliers who had to stop work last year had imposed penalties and extra cost.



Wednesday October 31, 2007

ACA probes district welfare offices

KOTA KINABALU: A graft probe into the dead receiving welfare aid in Sabah is widening with the Anti-Corruption Agency zeroing in on district welfare offices.

Sabah ACA director Latifah Md Yatim said they were checking on the falsification of documents to obtain payments for people who were dead.

Five people, mainly administrative staff from welfare offices in Tuaran and Penampang, were charged on Oct 23 for such offences.

The investigations came about following the Auditor General 2006 report that highlighted incidents of dead people receiving aid based on a sampling of aid recipients in districts of Kota Belud and Keningau.

"Though we have charged five people, it does not mean the investigations are over, we are continuing to investigate several other districts," Latifah told reporters at the Sabah ACA Hari Raya gathering.

She declined to say if more arrests were expected, adding "you will be informed if there is any arrest."

Latifah said the ACA action against corruption was against anyone and it did not matter if the person was senior or junior.