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Rooting out graft: ACA unit to study work procedures

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - As a step towards combating corruption in government agencies, the Anti-Corruption Agency has set up a special unit to study work procedures.

Officers from the Supervisory Division of the ACA would examine these procedures once notified by the departments and agencies.

The existence of the unit is to satisfy a provision in the Anti-Corruption Act 1997 which comes into effect today.

Under section 8(c) of the Act, the ACA director-general and his officers are required to study the procedures of government departments and agencies to identify possible areas where bribery may occur.

Disclosing this today, ACA director-general Datuk Shafee Yahaya said the division would make recommendations to the various department heads if weaknesses were found in their work procedures.

He did not reveal how many officers were posted to the division.

Shafee was speaking after a ceremony to mark the enforcement of the Act and the launch of the movement to consolidate the integrity system of the administrative management of the Government by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the ACA headquarters in Pesiaran Duta.

Other main points of the Act include the power to search a suspect's house, which is now provided only to the police.

The Act also provides for higher penalties - not less than 14 days' jail and not more than 20 years' imprisonment, and a fine of five times the bribe or RM10,000, whichever is higher - under section 16.

Failure of a public officer to report an attempted bribe carries a fine of not more than RM100,000 and imprisonment of up to 10 years under section 17(1) of the Act.

Shafee said the agency would recruit 237 officers to ensure there was enough manpower to enforce its increased powers under the Act.

These officers are expected to report for duty within the next two months and will be given a nine-month course before starting work.

He also said it was incumbent upon the chairmen of the administration management systems integrity committees to look into the work procedures of their respective departments and agencies.

At the ministry level, the chairman of the committee will be the secretary-general, Chief Ministers or Menteri Besar at the State level, and director-generals for departments and agencies.

Shafee said it was important that these agencies had client charters for their staff to follow. "This will provide guidelines and a set time for the departments and agencies to deliver their services to the public, and help prevent corrupt practices."

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