

**Audit report delay: PM must come clean**  
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**By Kim Quek**

COMMENT The unexplained delay in submitting the auditor general's (AG) annual report to Parliament is shaping up to be a major scandal.

Sin Chew Daily reported today that when asked when the AG's report will be presented in Parliament, an official from the AG's office casually replied that it would be on Dec 1, which is the last day of the current parliamentary session.

When the reporter finally managed to contact the deputy AG, he said he was not at liberty to answer any question, including whether the report is completed or when it would be presented to Parliament.

He suggested that questions be directed at Minister in the PM's Department Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz.

And Nazri, who is in charge of parliamentary affairs, was reported by Sin Chew to have said on Oct 10 that he was uncertain of the time of presentation of such report to Parliament, as this was the function of the Finance Ministry.

NONENazri was further reported in the Internet on Oct 11 to have said that he expected the report to be released two weeks after the cabinet had gone through it in the cabinet meeting on Oct 14.

Now, is the report completed?

PKR member of Parliament Johari Abdul (right) provided the answer when he told reporters in Parliament on Oct 13 that he personally called the AG's office the previous day and was told that "the report was completed much earlier than last year, and the officers there were proud because they had done a better job".

In fact, the officers were shocked when told that the report had not reached the MPs.

Persistent battering

It has been the tradition for the AG's report to reach parliamentarians in time for the annual budget debate, and this year's long delay (10 days after the budget was presented on Oct 7) despite persistent battering by opposition MPs is most unusual.

NONEFrom the utterances of Nazri (left) and AG officials, there is little doubt that the current year's report is ready but has been hijacked somewhere between the AG and Parliament.

Tampering with the AG's function is a serious breach of the constitution, as the AG is an independent institution enjoying the same degree of independence as the judiciary and the Election Commission.

Apart from being appointed by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the AG's remunerations and terms of service are determined by Parliament, and he may not be dismissed from service other than through a tribunal as that accorded to the judges (Article 105 of the federal constitution).

The AG's reports go directly to the Agong, who shall cause them to be laid before Parliament (Article 107).

It is obvious that such meticulously devised provisions in the constitution to accord independence to the AG are to ensure that he can operate freely as a neutral body to check on the financial management of the government without any interference from the executive.

#### Channel of communication

Note the channel of communication has been designed to by-pass the executive. It is from the AG to the Agong, and from the Agong to Parliament.

It is clear that the executive has no role to play in the formulation of AG's reports or its presentation to Parliament.

So it is of great concern that we should be told that the report has to be deliberated by the cabinet and its release is up to the Finance Ministry.

And with the latest revelation that the report will only be released on the last day of the current parliamentary session and the deputy AG gagged to divulge any information, the picture is now clear.

NONEThe AG, who has been much lauded in the past for having provided independent appraisals of the government's financial management, has become the latest victim to BN's ubiquitous tentacles which have subjugated the independent roles of virtually every other institution in this country.

To save the institution from being completely subsumed as a BN-controlled agency, Auditor-General Ambrin Buang (right) must now stand up to speak courageously to inform the nation when and to whom he has submitted his annual report, and whether there has been any attempt from the executive to alter the content or delay the release of the report.

And Prime Minister Najib Razak must come clean with what actions the executive has taken with respect to the AG's report.

Failing which, parliamentarians must immediately move a motion to censure the prime minister for such a breach of the constitution.