

DAP rep wants independent accountability panel

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An opposition parliamentarian wants a financial accountability commission (FAC) set up to tackle the recurring problems such as overspending and mismanagement cited in the 2010 Auditor-General's Report.

NONEAn independent FAC would ensure that the lofty aims of the Government Transformation Plan (GTP) are not "completely derailed", said Tony Pua (DAP-Petaling Jaya Utara) .

At a press conference in the Parliament lobby, Pua said the GTP when mooted in December 2009 was established to "fight corruption, particularly in government procurement".

However, looking at the series of problems highlighted in the recently released audit report, Pua said, "the results of the GTP are scarce" and rampant abuses are still left unheeded.

"The Marine Parks Department for example, took the leading role by purchasing binoculars worth not more than RM1,940 for RM56,350, or more than 28 times the market price.

"Of course, these were not the only offending items - the department purchased RM192,694 worth of products, including common items such as laptops, printers, an LCD TV and a DVD player, when the total value of (the products) should not exceed RM20,193," Pua said.

'Education Ministry a persistent offender'

"The Education Ministry is a persistent offender, with a litany of lapses recorded by the Auditor-General on a yearly basis, such as a RM160.7 million project in Sabah to equip 300 schools by 2008. However, at the end of 2010, only two computer laboratories were completed," he said.

Another example Pua cited was the unchecked expenses of Majlis Amanah Rakyat (Mara) , with the agency spending RM1,200 to buy an oven worth RM419 and folding beds costing RM100 each for RM500.

"This is despite having taken the limelight in the previous year (2009) for paying RM42,320 for one notebook computer," he said.

NONE In such cases where repeat offences were involved, the GTP had been proven to be "futile" as there was "little regard" for the measures put in place by the Performance Management & Delivery Unit (Pemandu) .

The GTP measures failed multi-fold, Pua said, because "they were either ineffective, such as voluntary disclosure of procurement contracts, or there was little political will on the part of the government, particularly from the cabinet, to enforce firm disciplinary measures" against the offenders.

He added: "The result, naturally, is the continued abuse of finances in government procurement and management of projects.

"The formation of an independent FAC that is answerable to Parliament and empowered to mete out punitive action against government officers guilty of misconduct, corruption and negligence is the solution."

The FAC proposed should not be helmed by civil servants so as to prevent any conflict of interest. It should be headed by leading professionals in the field of audit and integrity, such as the Malaysian Institute of Certified Public Accountants and Transparency International-Malaysia.

"Only then can there be hope that real action will be taken against offending government officers, lending teeth to the GTP's fight against corruption in government procurement processes and ensure substantial deterrence to continued abuse in the management of government finances," Pua said.