

Toothless MACC Lets Culprits Off The Hook

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After much "prompting and cajoling", the Auditor-General's Report was finally released and tabled in Parliament on 24th October 2011.

On the very next day, the MACC released a press statement announcing that it has opened up 36 investigations into the irregularities and scandals disclosed in the Auditor-General's Report.

Within a week, MACC had completed a lightning-quick probe on the case which involves the Marine Park Department paying over RM100,000 on 2 pairs of night-vision binoculars. As there were 3 non-working days last week (the Deepavali public holiday on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday), MACC's speed in this investigation is truly astounding and beyond belief.

However, it is most regrettable that the result of the investigation did not match up to taxpayers' expectations. MACC had hastily concluded that "no graft or abuse of power was involved, merely non-compliance of ministry of finance guidelines and governmental tendering procedures". It is obvious that MACC had chickened out and meekly passed the "hot potato" back to the Marine Park Department, proposing that the department take disciplinary action against the errand officers and blacklist the relevant suppliers.

The conclusion made by MACC is a huge disservice to taxpayers and there is an overwhelming sense of disappointment all around.

The cast-iron fact is that Marine Park Officers paid more than RM100,000 for 2 night-vision binoculars which cost less than RM5,000 in the open market and RM47,725 for colour sonar equipment for which the market price is RM8,255. If the lame excuse for overpayment is that the officers in charge were unfamiliar with the prevailing market prices and conditions, then how could an escape clause be gifted to errand purchasing officers of the department for extensive overpayment of common items such as RM11,845 for a laptop and colour printer with a combined market price of RM3,428, and RM16,100 for a LCD television and DVD player with a market price of RM2,182?

The above items were to be installed on a new RM7.51-million all-weather aluminium boat, which the department took delivery of on 24th December 2010.

On top of that, the supplier had failed to comply with the provisions in the contract, and yet the government had paid the supplier in full. This meant that the government had overpaid the supplier by RM100,517.

How can these irresponsible and dubious characters be let off the hook so easily?

Such shortcomings would surely raise questions pertaining to the reliability and safety standards of the vessel. The vessel is meant for patrolling the high seas during the monsoon season. With such lame investigation procedures and profound lack of accountability, it would be too late to start a

witch hunt when officers' lives are lost while carrying out their duties!

The officers and companies involved in these highly irregular transactions must not be let off the hook so easily. The MACC must take sterner action against the culprits involved as a deterrent to other unscrupulous parties. If the MACC is afraid of these low-level civil servants, what hope do we have of them uncovering the true culprits in the Feedlot Corp scandal?

If the MACC does not take stern action against these errant officers and suppliers, we will likely see such nonsense again in a year's time when the next AG's Report is unveiled.

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