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ACA to undergo huge revamp

PM wants beefed-up agency to be restructured and totally independent

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Prime Minister has announced far-reaching reforms to the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) to give it independence and more bite.

The reforms include turning the Anti-Corruption Agency into a "full-fledged" Malaysian Commission on Anti-Corruption (MCAC), setting up an independent advisory board and a parliamentary committee, as well as tripling the size of the force and providing comprehensive protection for whistleblowers.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the reforms were a priority and he wanted them in place before the year's end.

"It is my fervent hope that by restructuring the ACA, its effectiveness, transparency and accountability will be considerably raised while public trust in its integrity and independence be quickly renewed," he said yesterday in his keynote address at the *Asean Integrity Dialogue 2008* at the Malaysian Institute of Integrity.

Elaborating on the four key reforms, Abdullah said the restructured MCAC would table its annual report to a soon-to-be set up parliamentary committee on the prevention of corruption which would have the power to seek clarification and explanation on the report.

Another core element, he said, was the setting up of an indepen-



Making his mark: Abdullah (right) signing the plaque after opening the Asean Integrity Dialogue 2008 in Kuala Lumpur. Also present were (from left) Malaysian Institute of Integrity president Datuk Dr Mohd Tap Salleh and chairman Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan. — Bernama

dent corruption prevention advisory board comprising "prominent and upstanding" members of the community appointed by the King, on the Prime Minister's advice, to advise the MCAC on administrative and operational matters and on cases of public interest.

"The board can enquire or recommend that certain measures be undertaken. More importantly, the board will act to assure the public

that public interest cases are dealt with appropriately and adequately," he said.

However, the ultimate decision to prosecute would lie with the Attorney-General although the board could ask him to take another look at cases he had decided not to pursue.

On whistleblowers, Abdullah said the public perception was that enforcement agencies often went after

the whistleblower instead of investigating the charges.

He announced that there would be a law in place to give whistleblowers and witnesses "comprehensive protection".

"It is our hope that with better protection, more people will come forward to report corruption, thereby allowing justice to run its course," he said, adding, however, this was not "unfettered freedom" for people

to say or write anything about anybody without proof.

"I expect them to be responsible for the allegations they make," he said.

Abdullah also announced that the anti-corruption force would triple in size over the next five years, with a further 5,000 officers added to its existing 2,000 members.

The MCAC would also have new terms of service and remuneration to attract talented and dedicated individuals, and the power to hire and fire, he added.

The head of the MCAC would be appointed by the King on the Prime Minister's advice.

Abdullah said he expected the MCAC to be "fully independent".

"I am not here to interfere. They can independently decide how to run the organisation and how they want to operate," he said, adding that even in the current set-up, he had never interfered with the work of the ACA.

Asked whether the MCAC would report to the Prime Minister or to Parliament, Abdullah said: "The report would ultimately go to Parliament."

When contacted, Attorney General Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail said he would have no problem working with the advisory panel to be set up by the MCAC.

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All round thumbs-up for proposed creation of MCAC