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Working for the people

> MACC should not be afraid to haul in the 'big fish'

BY ZAKIAHKOYA
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

THE Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) compliance unit - officially known as the Excellence and Professionalism Division - carries the whole image of the graft-busting organisation on its shoulders, figuratively speaking.

If the compliance unit does not perform, and is not seen to perform, there is no doubt that MACC will bear the brunt of criticisms from a watching public.

According to MACC, the compliance unit "supervises the conduct of MACC officers to ensure they perform their duties professionally and are not influenced by any sentiments", political or otherwise.

The recent public statement by its chief commissioner Datuk Seri Abu Kassim Mohamed is exactly the kind of promise that everyone wants to hear from the steward of a body like MACC.

He had said he would step down if any complaint made to the MACC, including those against cabinet ministers, went uninvestigated.

It is a trust-building covenant that he has made with the public, and certainly not something one should say without having an

iron-clad resolve to match. There will certainly be no shortage of observers to hold him to his word.

As the compliance unit is supposed to report directly to the MACC head, one hopes that in the making of the promise, Abu Kassim has placed the whip high on the head of the compliance unit, so as to ensure performance.

The MACC and the government should ensure the compliance unit is well oiled - to allow it to be able to perform its duties without hitches.

Indeed, it needs supporting frameworks like the Whistleblower Protection Bill and integrity assessment of personnel for it to be effective.

While the public is always gunning for the MACC to go for the 'big fish' to demonstrate its ability to fulfill the stated objectives, it should bear in mind that it is not alone in that endeavour. It investigates cases,

but it is the Attorney-General's Chambers that ultimately decides whether a case is strong enough to stand up in court.

The two are partners in that effort. Just as it is incumbent upon the MACC to investigate thoroughly and to get the right evidence, the AG's Chambers has a duty to work closely with the investigators to ensure a case is speedily prosecuted.



Investigations into illegal sand mining require MACC officers to be on the site itself.

ZULKIFLI ERSAL/
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But not everything is within the MACC's control - witnesses' integrity for one.

As demonstrated in a recent high-profile case against a politician for money politics, a number of prosecution witnesses turned hostile, dealing a huge blow to MACC's investigators. The witnesses were speedily charged for perjury.

Granted, that these may be genuine problems. In the real world, however, the public - and those who observe our graft-fighting performance - only care for results.

The people want results that will boost integrity in public spending, plug leakages in government allocations and procurements, and in the long run, directly or indirectly improve the life of Malaysians.

These results are attainable, provided that MACC first carries out its duties professionally and with the common people in mind.

Take for example, the investigations into the illegal sand mining companies.

After the flurry of investigations which were very much in the media spotlight, all that was reeled in were the smaller fry.

It is public perception that illegal sand mining companies are connected politically and it was a disappointment when no 'big fish' was hauled up.

The compliance unit would therefore have to ensure that all mentioned in the "information

received" are actually investigated.

If there is any mention of well-connected names but not much evidence, the MACC should go down to the sites and "infiltrate" the operations if they have to.

The MACC compliance unit should ensure MACC officers go further than just looking at the documents and interviewing witnesses.

The success of their investigations will have a direct impact on the lives of those who live in the vicinity of illegal sand mines.

For instance, at the border of Perak and Selangor, in the Hulu Selangor district, roads that were built for the public with taxpayers' money have again and again been potholed and made inaccessible by sand-carrying lorries that serve the illegal mines.

To get to anywhere in Selangor, the people living there have to cross the border into Perak, and come back into Selangor using another route.

MACC would get a big boost with the common people if the officers were to get down on their knees and dig the dirt on the sand mining companies, never mind which political parties the company directors belong to.

This is one area the compliance unit can get its axe grinding on corruption to allow MACC to achieve its national key performance indicator (NKPI).