

OVERSIGHT BODY

'WATCHDOG MUST BE INDEPENDENT'

The body will fail if it can't truly act on complaints, says expert

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NON-GOVERNMENTAL organisations and even an opposition party have lauded the government for announcing plans for an independent body with enhanced powers to investigate complaints against law enforcement agencies.

However, they voiced concerns that such a move would be doomed to fail if the body was not free from political interference or if it could not truly act on all legitimate complaints.

Centre to Combat Corruption and Cronyism acting chief executive officer Pushpan Murugiah, in welcoming the move, said the centre had long called for better oversight over institutions.

He added that this was especially important for enforcement agencies that had been allowed to act with impunity in the past and had faced allegations of corruption.



(From left) Pushpan Murugiah, Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye and Oh Tong Keong

the Public Complaints Bureau and the yet-to-be-implemented Independent Police Conduct Commission, are far too weak and prone to political abuse to provide any meaningful oversight and redress for aggrieved parties.

"The most important feature that this independent body must have is that it has to truly be independent, as divorced from political interference as possible. It has to be answerable only to Parliament."

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had earlier told the Dewan Rakyat that the government was mulling the establishment of an independent body to probe enforcement agencies when an allegation or report was lodged against them.

He said it would ensure greater

at that their complaints against the civil service were not binned, but probed and acted upon.

He said public complaints against enforcement agencies were never fairly investigated and they could be "defensive", leaving the people with only their version of accounts and difficulty in pursuing the matter.

"For so many years, the public have been complaining by writing to the media as well as the authorities, but it was all in vain," he said.

"Now, we are given the assurance, but I hope it does not take long for the body to be set up and the A-GG (Attorney-General's Chambers) to review it. I feel it may take sometime, but it must be done immediately with a sense of urgency."

"Therefore, the people feel that there is no need to report similar incidents because the power of the people cannot compete with that of the law enforcement authorities.

"As such, if an independent unit can be established to investigate such incidents, it not only avoids any internal bias and cover-up, but also gives people more confidence in the investigation, demonstrating fairness, justice and transparency," he said.

More importantly, Oh said, this independent investigation unit must be given absolute power to work without fear or favour to effectively fulfil its responsibilities and duties, and not disappoint the expectations of the government and the people.

"It is Gerakan's hope that be-

'Appointment of MACC chief will follow due process'

KUALA LUMPUR: The appointment of the next Malaysia Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) chief will be based on the process approved by the Parliamentary Select Committee and relevant authority bodies.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim told the Lower House yesterday that the process of appointing the new MACC chief should follow due process.

"The appointment of the current MACC chief was done by the Pagoh member of parliament (Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin) and he was certified by Pagoh as a person who is independent," he said.

"The new method to appoint the MACC chief will depend on the progress made in Parliament.

"If the mechanism decided is from the recommendation by Transparency International-Malaysia, then it must be reviewed by the Attorney-General's Chambers and the Parliamentary Select Committee.

"If it's doable then I have no problem, but the process must be respected."

Anwar was responding to Datuk Mas Ermiyati (PN-Masjid Tanah) on the government's process of appointing the new MACC chief as current chief commis-