

Explain decision to ‘clear’ MACC chief of misappropriation, Ideas tells advisory board

High time to introduce conflict of interest law, regulate public servants’ asset ownership, says think-tank CEO Tricia Yeoh

TheVives

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KUALA LUMPUR – The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Advisory Board (LPPR) must explain how it derived the conclusion to clear chief commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki of any alleged wrongdoing of owning corporate stock, a think-tank said.

Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas) chief executive Tricia Yeoh also said the board’s chairman Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang’s explanation on the matter today did not fully address the public’s concerns over the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC)’s integrity.

She said although Ideas welcomed the press conference today and the board’s move to hold a special meeting on November 24, it was concerned that the decision to “absolve” Azam was based on a single meeting, and without a thorough investigation.

Tricia said the board did not carry out its duties properly if it drew a conclusion based solely on Azam’s explanation, adding that the board must also transparently elaborate on how the conclusion was reached.

Moreover, she said the board should explain whether Azam had declared his assets according to government procedures.

“The absence of a comprehensive explanation as to how the decision was made, done transparently, will erode the public’s trust in MACC as a critical institution for combating corruption in the country,” Tricia said in a statement.”

“We view such an explanation as critical to maintaining MACC’s credibility as an independent institution that can effectively combat corruption in Malaysia. Parliamentary oversight over MACC is even more imperative than ever.”

She said it is time the government introduced a conflict of interest law and regulations for all public servants with regards to assets they are allowed to own.

“There are also legitimate questions being raised as to the legality of the share purchase, which must be answered,” she said.

Earlier today, Abu Zahar insisted that he did not receive any documentary proof alleging impropriety involving the anti-graft body’s top guns, saying no emails pertaining to claims of misconduct – supposedly sent by former Consultation and Corruption Prevention Panel (PPPR) member Prof Edmund Terence Gomez – had reached him.

Both PPPR and LPPR are independent oversight bodies under the MACC.

The Vibes had, on Sunday, published the email trails between Gomez, the LPPR secretariat, and PPPR chairman Tan Sri Borhan Dolah that took place last November.

However, during a tell-all press conference this afternoon, Abu Zahar challenged Gomez to provide evidence he had indeed sent those emails detailing the alleged impropriety.

Earlier in his press conference, he also revealed that the board he chairs had conducted a meeting with Azam on November 24 to seek an explanation on the said allegations that have since plagued the anti-graft body.

Following the meeting, he said LPPR was satisfied by the explanation given by Azam and found no criminal elements involving him or any conflict of interest.

According to Abu Zahar, Azam had explained that the purchase of millions of ringgit of shares of a public listed company supposedly bought by him was actually done by his brother, Nasir Baki, under his name.

However, Abu Zahar said Azam had no vested interest in the shares and does not own any of them.

Tricia said the LPPR and four other external bodies are expected to operate as check-and-balance mechanisms for the MACC.

She said these include the Special Committee on Corruption, Anti-Corruption Advisory Board, Complaints Committee, Consultation and Corruption Prevention Panel, and the Operations Review Panel.

“As a critical institution that upholds integrity in the nation, it is essential that the MACC and its oversight bodies embody the highest standards,” she said.

“As such, the oversight bodies tasked to provide accountability over the commission must consider themselves the bastions of transparency.

“Even the slightest delay in acting on a complaint can sway public opinion.”
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