

ADDRESSING COMPLAINTS

# Azalina: Ombudsman Bill to be tabled in Parliament in October

**PUTRAJAYA:** The Ombudsman Malaysia 2023 Bill is expected to be tabled in Parliament in October, said Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform) Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said.

She said the government was engaging with government departments and agencies, and civil society organisations to fine-tune integrity and governance issues in addressing public complaints.

"After the engagements, the bill will be presented to the cabinet for policy approval. We aim to table the bill in Parliament during the October sitting.

"The government will brief all members of parliament at the next sitting to get their feedback as a form of meaningful engagement to finalise the bill quickly.

"The setting up of the ombudsman is vital towards a more effective and efficient public service delivery system and a more responsible and fair government for the people," she said yesterday af-

ter an engagement session.

Organisations at the session organised by the Prime Minister's Department's Legal Affairs Division included the Prime Minister's Department, Public Service Department (PSD), Public Services Commission, Finance Ministry, Bar Council, Suara Rakyat Malaysia and Congress Of Unions of Employees in Public and Civil Services.

Azalina said the ombudsman would be an independent and statutory body and its members would not be civil servants.

"They will be direct appointments, not secondments (from the civil service). We want it to be a statutory body, not a government agency, and its members are not pensioned. This

means there is a presumption of independence.

"Appointments are proposed to be for six years, with no extension, and members will be replaced. We do not want the same people to be monitoring."



Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said

She said she was keen for the ombudsman's system to be modelled after United Kingdom's or New Zealand's. The engagement session discussed amending several main policies to provide for investigative powers, a time mandate for complaints to be resolved, an annual report to be tabled and debated in Parliament and for the Public Complaints Bureau to handle certain and first- and second-tier complaints.

Legal Affairs Division director-

general Datuk Seri Khairul Dzamee Daud said he had suggested that the ombudsman be empowered to suggest that the PSD take action against agency heads who mismanaged issues.

Azalina said it was vital for the ombudsman to start properly as she did not want to give people false hope.

"The prime minister wants us to be an accountable government and one element is you must allow complaints. It does not mean that the government is right all the time. People are unhappy with certain decisions and processes and we have a lot of maladministration. But sometimes, civil servants discharge their duties, but the people see it as the wrong way.

"At the moment, 85 per cent of first-tier complaints involve local authority issues. Some 20,000 complaints are about streetlights, poor maintenance of drains and parking issues.

"People prefer to complain to a (public complaints) bureau rather

than ministries or agencies. This is because when the bureau refers complaints to ministries or agencies, they get a faster response."

First-tier complaints are those made to the Public Complaints Bureau. Second-tier complaints are issues raised by the public again because they were unsatisfied with the action taken after the first complaint.

In 2019, the Pakatan Harapan government under Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad mooted the Ombudsman Malaysia law as part of its reform agenda.

Later, during Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's government, then law minister Datuk Seri Takiyuddin Hassan said the government had submitted the bill for review and approval from the Attorney-General's Chambers before it was to be tabled in Parliament.

In 2021, then prime minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said the ombudsman bill was in its final stages and expected to be tabled in Parliament in 2022.