

'Ombudsman must be structured to be truly independent'

PETALING JAYA: The proposed Ombudsman to investigate public complaints against civil servants, department heads and government agencies must be a truly independent watchdog free of government influence, say civil society organisations.

Center to Combat Corruption and Cronyism (C4) acting chief executive officer Pushpan Murugiah said there should be no more delays in setting up the Ombudsman.

He said it is crucial that the independence of the Ombudsman be upheld.

"For C4, the issues have always been the independence of the institution.

"The appointment process has to be detached from the influence of the executive or on the advice of the Prime Minister," he said when contacted yesterday.

He suggested that the appointment process for the Ombudsman be done through a transparent selection process, preferably through Parliament, adding that the appointments and termination of members serving the Ombudsman should not come under the Public Service Department.

"They should be independently funded through a budget approved by Parliament," he said.

Pushpan also said the time frame given for the Ombudsman

to address public complaints should not be too long.

"We also feel the proposed period of 24 months to resolve the complaints is too long and should be reduced to a maximum of one year," he said.

He also said the Ombudsman must be given more power to compel the relevant agencies to act on its findings and recommendations.

"If not, there is no difference between the Ombudsman and the current Public Complaints Bureau," he added.

Meanwhile, Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Suaram) executive director Sevan Doraisamy lauded the setting up of the Ombudsman

after more than a decade since it was mooted.

However, he said there is still room for improvement to the proposed draft Bill.

"There must be transparency in the selection process of the Ombudsman members.

"No political appointees, as the previous government did with the current commissioners of the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam)," he said yesterday.

He also said the Ombudsman should be empowered to make surprise visits to government agencies based on the nature of the complaints received.

He added that a time frame

should be given for when issues are resolved following the findings of the Ombudsman.

Transparency International Malaysia president Dr Muhammad Mohan said the full details of the structure of the Ombudsman will be made known to stakeholders at a later date.

"We will have a closer look at the proposed laws to ensure that integrity and transparency are upheld when they are implemented," he said.

**FOR MORE
STORIES** See page 5

The Star 9/5/2023