

How scandal robbed Sabahans of water

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By: David Thien

Kota Kinabalu: The Water Department scandal which involves officials entrusted with ensuring supply, pocketing millions through a scheme is a good case study on corruption in Sabah.

The seizure by MACC of half the RM114.5 million found stashed in luxury autos, offices and homes of the civil servants involved, is the second biggest in the history of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission.

MACC head Azam Baki said the seizure was made following the arrests of a director and a deputy director of the department which led to the seizure including assets of mistresses acquired from the ill-gotten money which Sabahans endured water shortages.

“The Sabah Water Department corruption case happened around 2016. MACC seized over RM114.5 million in cash, including luxury cars, jewellery and properties from the suspects,” said Datuk Roger Chin, past President of the Sabah Law Society.

He was speaking at NGO Sabar-Kopi Tiam Council podcast on “Why is Sabah Struggling? Unpacking GLCs, Corruption & Lost Billions” recently.

“The 1MDB case also had such astronomical amount of money seized. What is scary is how normalised corruption has become. We all should be outraged.

“In the case of the Sabah Water Department, the RM114.5 plus luxury cars, jewellery and properties, were kickbacks for awarding contracts and projects.

“Why was what happened bad? Because it is embezzlement of public funds. How did that happen? Very simply put, all these contractors are business people. They are not going to be paying their kickbacks from the profits that they made.

“What they have done is to add that portion (kickbacks) into the contract. This inflates the contract.

“Say the actual cost plus normal profit is RM150. All of a sudden you have to add on the kickback. Let’s just randomly say it is RM30.

“So, instead of putting in a bid for RM150 ringgit which is cost plus the right amount of profit, you make it RM180. What then happens is the government spends extra RM30 of taxpayer’s money for this enlarged project. Which should not be the case.

“What that means is RM30 that is meant for other things for the people has now disappeared.

Chin said the second reason why it is really bad is because those contracts were given to people who were aligned to the people who got the kickbacks.

“So whether it is the most qualified people doing the contracts is highly debatable and probably not. Hence, if the people who got the contracts were not the best for the job means there would be a lot of contracts that were substandard or not carried out properly.

“So now you know why our water system is so bad.

“Multiply that RM30 kickback by a few thousand and you get hundreds of millions. And you also talk about the people who got the jobs who simply do substandard work.

“Accessibility to clean water is one of the main problems in Sabah.

“What happened was that money meant for clean water has been taken out of the system. Which is why we have lack of clean water.

“Not only clean water, think about the hundreds of millions of ringgit which should have gone into infrastructure development whether it is water or electricity.

“RM114 million was taken out of the system and this is just the Water Department. How about the other corruption issues. There are easily several more. Perhaps about half a billion ringgit or maybe more taken out of the system.

“If we had just kept that money in the system and built the infrastructure that we needed, we would have far better infrastructure today,” he said, adding this is why corruption is a huge problem.

“Because money has been taken out of the system you and I suffer from insufficient water and electricity.”

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"Sabah Voices to Action - Shaping Sabah's Future Together" is a citizen-driven, non-partisan initiative running from March to June 2025, dedicated to amplifying Sabahans' voices, fostering meaningful discussions, and shaping policies on education, healthcare, public infrastructure, and good governance.

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Together, we can build a stronger, more inclusive Sabah!

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M'sia to champion inclusive cities

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's election as president of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) Assembly for the 2025-2027 term is a recognition of the nation's achievements and offers a strategic platform to elevate its profile on the global stage.

Senior lecturer at the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi Mara, Dr Mazlan Che Soh, said the prestigious role would allow Malaysia to showcase its sustainable development model and serve as an example for other countries.

"As UN-Habitat president, Malaysia will have the opportunity to influence the direction of global policies in urbanisation, affordable housing, disaster management and climate change.

"The role will also enhance bilateral and multilateral cooperation with UN agencies, member states and non-governmental organisations in implementing sustainability-driven projects," he told Bernama.

Mazlan added that the appointment enables Malaysia to become a leading voice for developing countries in sustainable urbanisation, social equity and inclusive development.

He said Malaysia could also leverage its presidency to spearhead regional cooperation in building resilient, inclusive and smart cities, as well as establish a regional centre of excellence.

Mazlan highlighted Malaysia's strong commitment to the sustainability



Nga presiding the UN-Habitat Assembly.

"The Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 promotes inclusive economic growth, balanced regional development and environmental conservation, while under the 12th Malaysia Plan, the Sustainable Development Goals have been integrated into national development planning," he said.

He pointed out that several policies have also been developed in line with global sustainability principles, including the National Environmental Policy and the National Policy on Climate Change.

On Friday, Housing and Local Government Minister Nga Kor Ming announced that Malaysia's presidency was unanimously approved by 193 member states at the UN-Habitat Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya.

Established in 1975 and elevated to a full programme by the UN General Assembly in 2001, the UN-Habitat Assembly is the highest global decision-making body on sustainable urbanisation.