

KERATAN AKHBAR



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MULTIBILLION-RINGGIT PROJECT

INVESTIGATE 'RIVER OF LIFE', MACC URGED

RM4.4 billion allocated, but project has little to show for it, says SPAN chairman

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THE Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has been urged to probe into the multi-billion-ringgit "River of Life" (RoL) project, which critics claim has fallen short on delivery.

National Water Services Commission chairman Charles Santiago said graft-busters needed to open an investigation into the RM4.4 billion project.

He said parallel probes should also be initiated by the Prime Minister's Department, the Auditor General's Office and the Public Accounts Committee to find out whether the intended aim of the spending was achieved. Santiago claimed that years af-

ter the RoL project was initiated, with funding "almost twice the Selangor government's 2019 Budget", the project appeared to have little to show for it, save for the beautification of Dataran Merdeka, which was already showing signs of decay.

"Something has gone really wrong here. There were things that were bought where there was no reason for it and now, in a very short time, they are in terrible condition," he said, adding that the findings of the investigations should be made public in the interest of transparency.

Santiago, who is Klang member of parliament, said the funding could have been properly spent, but the project had failed regardless. This, he noted, was why the probe was crucial.

"The question is whether the

money was spent responsibly and audited, or was it the way the money was spent that had led to the project's failure."

Santiago cited the project's plan to upgrade the Klang River so that it becomes an attraction, treat the polluted water and rejuvenate the waterway for sports and transport.

However, he said, 50 per cent of the sewage in the Klang Valley still went into the water despite the project, pointing to the bigger issue of infrastructure development in the capital.

"If you look at developments in the Federal Territories, it's very piecemeal. It's not thought out carefully. It's always infrastructure-based and whenever people propose infrastructure-based activities, it's always about big money. But infrastructure doesn't solve the problems we face."

Santiago also urged the Federal Territories Ministry to conduct its own investigation and audit as the money was spent by it, although it was done under the pre-



A worker cleaning a fish pond along the 'River of Life' in Kuala Lumpur earlier this year. Critics claim that sections of the project have shown signs of deterioration. FILE PIC

vious administration.

He also called on interest and community groups to get on board by lodging reports with the MACC.

The *New Straits Times* yesterday front-paged how the RoL project had come under fire from critics. Heritage and environmental experts had claimed that sections of the project had already shown signs of deterioration.

The Federal Territories Ministry was quoted as saying that it had asked for a RM1 million federal allocation to facilitate repair work.

Critics had also claimed that little consideration was given to preserving heritage values when the project was initiated.

Federal Territories Minister Khalid Samad had said the project would proceed until 2020, as more than RM4 billion had been allocated for it.

He, however, declined to comment on whether the project was a success or failure as it had not reached its deadline.

The project was meant to revive

the polluted rivers as well as transform the city centre here into a vibrant hub for citizens. The project was expected to be completed by 2020.

There are three components to the RM4.4 billion project: river cleaning, river master planning and beautification, and river development.

Of the amount, RM3.4 billion was allocated for cleaning up the rivers and RM1 billion for landscaping.

The river-cleaning component addresses the 110km Sungai Klang stretch, while the river beautification attends to the 10.7km stretch along the Klang and Gombak river corridors across 11 precincts from Titiwangsa to Brickfields near Mid Valley City.

The precincts are river corridors in Titiwangsa, Pekeliling, the Putra World Trade Centre, the Sime Darby loop, Dang Wangi, Raja Laut, Masjid Jamek, the Kuala Lumpur Railway Station, Brickfields, KL Sentral and Sepuluh.