

LRT crash probe transparency in question

The probe, which is chaired by MoT secretary general, leaves rail experts doubting the transparency

by AFIQ AZIZ

RAILWAY experts are doubting the transparency and independence of the task force set up by the Transport Ministry (MoT) in probing the Light Rail Transit (LRT) Kelana Jaya Line collision that occurred last week.

It was the first of such incident since LRT's inception 23 years ago.

Several industry players, including safety experts, criticised the composition of the committee which is led by MoT secretary general Datuk Isham Ishak.

Isham is also a Prasarana Malaysia Bhd board member, who was appointed to the position on Jan 18 this year, according to the company's website.

"This is clearly not independent. The regulator should lead the investigation, which is the Land Public Transport Agency.

"The secretary general should not be in the picture at all. Moreover, he is Prasarana's board member," said a former executive of a rail company who requested anonymity.

On the night of May 24, an LRT train under manual control, which was undergoing testing, ran into another coach which was carrying 213 passengers between the KLCC and Kampung Baru underground stations.

The incident left all passengers injured, 47 severely. They were rushed to the Kuala Lumpur Hospital for treatment, with three being admitted into intensive care due to brain haemorrhage.



Prasarana's technicians at KLCC station on the day of the accident. Any conflict of interest among the members must be avoided at all cost to allow transparency and regain public confidence, says industry expert

Following the incident, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong set up a task force to investigate the collision.

Wee gave two weeks for the committee to conclude the probe, stating that the investigation must take into account the entire range of technical and operational components in connection with the tragic collision.

According to *Bernama*, the nine-person probe team will be chaired by Isham who will be assisted by Normah Osman, who is MoT's deputy secretary general.

Meanwhile, three committee members include MoT divisional secretary (land) Wan Mohd Asraf Wan Salleh, MoT legal advisor Azlin Sabtu and Air Accident Investigation Bureau chief inspector Brig General Izani Ismail.

Four experts were proposed to assist the investigation, namely Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) former rail chief

Yuslizar Daud and Anthony Arokianathan, who is the maintenance support signalling manager at ERL Maintenance Support Sdn Bhd.

Other two are Faculty of Engineering members: Prof Madya Dr Nor Aziati Abdul Hamid of Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia and Prof Dr Wong Shaw Voon of Universiti Putra Malaysia.

While noting that there are members from different organisations, former SPAD COO Azhar Ahmad said an investigation task force should be more independent, with a mixture of railway practitioner, academician and regulator.

"We can learn from the UK where an Independent Railway Accident Investigation Board was established to investigate any safety concerns and will publish its report annually and make it public," Azhar told *The Malaysian Reserve*.

The former land transport regulator also cited the way Singapore handled investigations into the Sin-

gapore Mass Rapid Transit (SMRT) accident in March 2016, which resulted in the death of two trainees.

According to the investigation report, the accident was due to failure of ensuring safety measures compliance at the workplace.

The SMRT Accident Review Panel consisted of the SMRT Board Risk Committee and three independent experts from Keppel Corp, Transport for London which runs the London Underground, and a former staff member of Hong Kong's Mass Transit Railway Corp.

The following year, SMRT was fined S\$400,000 (RM1.25 million).

"It must be noted that any conflict of interest among the members must be avoided at all cost to allow transparency and regain public confidence," Azhar warned.

Malaysian Society for Occupational Safety and Health (MSOSH) VP 3 Fakhru Anwar Ahmad Affandi warned that conflict of interest will arise if the investiga-

tion is carried out by agencies within the related organisation.

"We are afraid that the findings will not address the core issues because of the conflict of interest during the investigation process.

"MSOSH calls for Prasarana and MoT to use independent and neutral experts like MSOSH and other NGOs so the findings can be more transparent.

"Involvement of professional bodies like the Institute of Engineers Malaysia is also relevant for this purpose. We need to tackle the root cause and how to avoid similar accidents in the future," said Fakhru Anwar.

Following the LRT train mishap, Transparency International Malaysia president Dr Muhammad Mohan urged for a Royal Commission of Inquiry to be set up, with independent experts brought in.

Seremban MP and former Transport Minister Anthony Loke Siew Fook urged the police to conduct a thorough investigation to determine if there were any elements of negligence.

Selangor executive councillor in charge of public transport Ng Sze Han had also sought the findings of the reports to be shared with the state government, as most of the LRT lines are located in Selangor.

Ng said such incidents could dampen the state's effort in encouraging public transport usage.

As for the injured passengers, Prasarana will be making a payment of RM1,000 to each of the 213 passengers on top of their medical bills.

Its former chairman Datuk Seri Tajuddin Abdul Rahman said the company will pay for the medical bill and follow-up treatment, among other, from the day of hospitalisation till recovery.