

Company behind uCustoms system denies project failed, says raked in hundreds of millions for govt

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Brilliance Information Sdn Bhd (Brinfo) director Asmar Haiza Ishak with lawyers Daljit Singh (right) and Nicholas Mark Pereira giving a press conference to address the issues raised recently in the Auditor General's Report, October 4, 2021. — Picture by Choo Choy MayMore

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 4 — The company behind the Ubiquitous Customs (uCustoms) system has come out to deny the negative portrayal of the project as reported within the Auditor General's Report (LKAN) Year 2019 Series 2, asserting it was an operational system raking in millions of ringgit in revenue through duties collected.

Brilliance Information Sdn Bhd (Brinfo) director Asmar Haiza Ishak, in a press conference today, stressed how the project was not a waste of federal resources that it was beyond the 27 per cent completion rate as reported in the LKAN.

Asmar, who was accompanied by company lawyers Daljit Singh and Nicholas Mark Pereira, explained the system was already in operation for 21 months before it was abruptly instructed to be halted by the Customs Department in December 2020 as per a circular they received.

The circular from the Customs Department, as provided by Asmar, cited the need for an evaluation and technical improvements to be done on the system, and with uCustoms' development contract also coming to an end.

"The information we got from the project team was that they were just told to stop their operation," she explained.

Asmar then cited a letter from the Shipping Association of Malaysia (SAM) addressed to the Customs Department from that same month, expressing their dismay and appealing for them to reinstate the uCustoms system.

Among the prominent points raised by SAM within the letter was how the Customs Department's decision to roll back to the previous Customs Information System (SMK) and abandon uCustoms was done without the consultation from affected stakeholders, was regressive, and that integration efforts including other systems had already begun.

"There have been more than 50,000 journeys arranged through uCustoms, with more than 1.3 million bills of landings obtained, and duties collected amounting to RM200 million.

"As such, it is illogical to roll back to SMK for all the manual processes again while the facts have shown otherwise," said Asmar as she read an excerpt from SAM's letter.

"The contents of this letter clearly show that the uCustom system was operational and had managed to collect duties in the hundreds of millions for the Malaysian government," Asmar asserted.

She said the words of SAM were enough to show that the uCustoms system was not only operational, well accepted among industry players, but also profitable for the government agency.

Last week, the uCustom system was brought to the fore after the LKAN revealed several questionable findings following an audit of the project.

They included the discovery of incomplete documents for payment vouchers for the system, and how the project remains incomplete since it began in October 2013 even after five extensions of time (EOT) were given to them.

The LKAN report included how the project costs ballooned from RM317.78 million to RM397.43 following the five extensions, with RM272.99 million already paid out, and that feasibility studies were not conducted before the project was implemented.

The uCustoms system is a project introduced by the Customs Department to replace an older information consolidation system that has been in place since 1995.

Following the LKAN's findings, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission detained Brinfo's chief executive on Saturday as part of their probe into the alleged mismanagement issues raised within the report.

When commenting on these findings within the LKAN, Asmar claimed that Brinfo were never given the opportunity to explain themselves or present the latest data and that the findings were compiled with input only from the Malaysian Customs Department

"We should be given an opportunity to explain the actual situation with accurate data because this issue has affected the reputation of our company.

"Images that have been displayed on print media on the arrest of our chief executives has also caused a drop in confidence and has threatened our positions with our other existing clients," said Asmar on MACC's arrest.

She explained how the findings within the LKAN were compiled with input only from the Malaysian Customs Department, and how Brinfo deserves to be given the opportunity to clarify its position.

Additionally, Asmar's lawyer Daljit said Brinfo would be writing to PAC chairman Wong Kah Woh to explain their side of the story.

"We urge for the PAC chairman to agree to meet with us as we have a few things that we need to clarify and mention to him that would let him have the other side of the story," said Daljit.