

**DALAM MAHKAMAH PERSEKUTUAN MALAYSIA DI
PUTRAJAYA
(BIDANG KUASA RAYUAN)**

RAYUAN SIVIL NO. 01-13-2007 (W)

ANTARA

- 1.KERAJAAN MALAYSIA**
- 2.KERAJAAN NEGERI SEMBILAN**
- 3.KERAJAAN NEGERI PERAK**
- 4.KERAJAAN NEGERI SELANGOR ... PERAYU-PERAYU**

DAN

LAY KEE TEE & 183 ORANG LAGI ... RESPONDEN-RESPONDEN

**(Dalam Perkara Rayuan Sivil No. W-01-12-04 dari Mahkamah
Rayuan Malaysia di Putrajaya)**

KORAM

**ARIFIN BIN ZAKARIA, HB(Malaya)
NIK HASHIM BIN NIK AB. RAHMAN, HMP
ZULKEFLI BIN AHMAD MAKINUDIN, HMP**

30 Oktober 2008

Judgment of Nik Hashim bin Nik Ab. Rahman, FCJ

Factual Background

1. The Government of Malaysia and the Governments of the States of Negeri Sembilan, Perak and Selangor appeal to this Court against the decision of the Court of Appeal (Gopal Sri Ram, JCA, Richard Malanjum, JCA (now CJ (Sabah & Sarawak), Hashim Yusoff, JCA (now FCJ)) given on 6 April 2005, whereby the Court of Appeal allowed the respondents' appeal with no order as to costs against the decision of the High Court (Azmel Maamor, J (later FCJ)) which affirmed the Senior Assistant Registrar's (the SAR's) decision in striking out the respondents' writ of summons and statement of claim pursuant to Order 18 rule 19(1)(a), (b), (c), (d) of the Rules of the High Court 1980 (the RHC).
2. Briefly, the facts are that the 184 respondents either are themselves persons who allegedly had suffered from the Japanese Encephalitis (JE)/Nipah virus or are dependants of persons who died from JE/Nipah virus or owners of pigs farms affected by the JE/Nipah virus. Alarmed by the virus, the affected respondents had requested the Federal and the respective State Governments to cull the pigs to contain the virus spreading. The respondents' complaint was that the Federal and the respective State Governments did not act fast enough but allowed or permitted the situation to worsen to such an extent that led to the respondents suffering injury.

3. In the 145 paragraphed statement of claim, the respondents narrated at length the events and these details cover some 48 pages. The causes of actions are as follows : negligence, breach of fiduciary duties, breach of statutory duties, negligent misstatement, fraud, unlawful deprivation of fundamental rights, misfeasance of public office and trespass to land, buildings and goods. They claimed for general damages, special damages consisting of RM73,412,750.00 for loss of pigs, RM60,826,097.00 for damages to farm facilities, RM1,190,000.00 for medical expenses and RM185,000.00 for funeral expenses; exemplary and aggravated damages, certain declaratory orders, interest and costs.

4. Against the claim, the appellants filed an application to strike out the action under Order 18 rule 19 (1)(a), (b), (c), (d) of the RHC on the following grounds :
 - (i) wrong or unnecessary parties have been sued;
 - (ii) no reasonable cause of action;
 - (iii) the claims were barred under :
 - (a) section 2(a) of the Public Authorities Protection Act 1948 (the PAPA);
 - (b) section 7(5) and (3B) of the Civil Law Act 1956 (the CLA);
 - (c) sections 36 and 78 of the Animals Act 1953 (the AA);
 - (d) section 4 of the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 (the PCIDA).

- (iv) the claims were unsustainable under sections 10-17 of the PCIDA; and
- (v) the statement of claim is prolix, raises no triable issue, is made up of submissions and evidence, prevents a fair trial and is an abuse of the court process.

5. The appellants' application for the striking out was allowed by the SAR and affirmed by the learned High Court judge. Although the above grounds were relied on, the learned High Court judge ruled that the first ground concerning non-suing of the primary tortfeasors was sufficient to dismiss the appeal. Amongst other things, he said :

“Pada saya, sebelum seseorang pegawai kerajaan itu bertanggung untuk sebarang kesalahan tort atau ketinggalan yang dilakukan, isu liabiliti pegawai berkenaan perlu diputuskan melalui perbicaraan di Mahkamah Terbuka. Jika, pegawai kerajaan terbabit didapati bertanggung, maka majikan mereka iaitu pihak Kerajaan yang merupakan principal mereka akan bertanggung secara vikarius. Jika pegawai kerajaan yang berkenaan tidak dinamakan sebagai Defendan bagaimana mereka boleh membela diri untuk menafikan tuduhan-tuduhan yang dilemparkan kepada mereka. Amatlah tidak adil dan tidak juga munasabah untuk memutuskan seseorang pegawai kerajaan itu bertanggung tanpa memberi mereka

peluang untuk membela tuduhan yang dibawa terhadap mereka. Untuk tujuan itu, pada penghakiman saya, pegawai kerajaan terbabit perlu dinamakan sebagai suatu pihak supaya liabiliti mereka dapat ditentukan dan jika mereka bertanggung maka majikan mereka bertanggung secara vikarius. Keperluan ini jelas dikehendaki mengikut S.6(1) Akta 359”

The above judgment was reported in **(2004) 8 CLJ 382**.

6. However, the Court of Appeal did not find favour with the decision of the learned High Court judge and allowed the appeal. In delivering the judgment of the court dated 13 May 2005, Gopal Sri Ram, JCA ruled that there were triable issues in the case and ordered it to be tried and disposed of speedily. The following are some of the gists of the relevant findings made by the Court of Appeal :

- (i) the application of Order 15 rule 6 of the RHC.
- (ii) the tortfeasors who were the relevant officers of the appellants need not be cited and sued as defendants under sections 4, 5 and 6 of the Government of Proceedings Act (Act 359).
- (iii) the appellants could be named and sued directly as primary tortfeasors under sections 4, 5 and 6 of Act 359.

- (iv) the case of **Haji Abdul Rahman v Government of Malaysia & Anor (1966) 2 MLJ 174** was wrongly decided and should no longer be followed. And the case of **Lai Seng & Co. v Government of Malaysia & Ors. (1973) 2 MLJ 36** was followed.
- (v) the decision in **Attorney General v Hartwell (2004) UKPC 12** applied to impose original liability on the appellants.
- (vi) the defence of limitation is a defence which must be put down in writing as part of a pleaded case.

Questions of Law

7. On 25 June 2007 this Court granted the appellants leave to appeal against the decision of the Court of Appeal on the following questions :
 - (1) Whether sections 4, 5 and 6 of Act 359 require the public officers or employees of the appellants, who are the alleged tortfeasors concerned must be named and be sued in a claim?
 - (2) Whether by virtue of sections 4, 5 and 6 of Act 359 the appellants being governments, can personally commit torts, to wit : negligence; breach of fiduciary duties; breach

of statutory duties; negligent misstatement; fraud; breach of constitutional rights; misfeasance of public office and trespass to land and property?

- (3) Whether the action of the appellants in applying to strike out the writ and statement of claim which is barred by section 4 of the PCIDA; section 78 of the AA; section 2(a) of the PAPA; section 7(5) and (3B) of the CLA is fit and proper?
- (4) Whether the appellants can be named and be sued directly and as primary tortfeasors by virtue of sections 4, 5 and 6 of Act 359.
- (5) Whether the issue of limitation must be pleaded in a defence and not raised as a ground for striking out an action pursuant to Order 18 rule 19(1) of the RHC.

8. With regard to the questions, I would answer them in the order of Questions (1), (2) and (4) taken together and follow by Questions (3) and (5) taken together as proposed by the appellants for the reason that the questions are interrelated.

Questions (1), (2) and (4)

9. Concerning the questions posed, learned Senior Federal Counsel for the appellants argued that the Court of Appeal was erroneous in its decision, in particular -

- (a) in the interpretation of sections 4, 5 and 6 of Act 359 and its reliance on **Lai Seng & Co** in the interpretation and in treating the decision in **Haji Abdul Rahman**, supra, as wrongly decided; and
- (b) In the application of Order 15 rule 6 of the RHC to the present case.

10. Learned counsel for the respondents, on the other hand, in support of the judgment of the Court of Appeal, submitted that the appellants were not impleaded as primary tortfeasors. The identity of the wrongdoer is a matter that merely goes to the burden of proof on a claimant to establish the wrongdoing at a trial. Further, the language of sections 4, 5 and 6 of Act 359 being clear and unambiguous, there is no basis in law to imply into the provisions a requirement in law for the specific officers concerned to be joined as a defendant. To read the provision in that way would be to limit its application in a way not intended by legislature and cited **Lai Seng & Co** in which Chang Min Tat (later FJ) ruled that though the wrongdoer was a proper defendant, the person liable for the acts of the wrongdoer was also a proper defendant on the basis that section 6 did not lay down any strict rule of practice in proceedings against the Government. In any event, a failure to join parties cannot in itself be made a basis for a striking out in light of the clear expression of Order 15 rule 6(1) of the RHC which the Court of Appeal had applied to support its decision.

11. In my view, the above questions concern the construction of sections 4, 5 and 6 of Act 359. For ease of reference, I would now reproduce their provisions which are as follows :

Claims enforceable by proceedings against Government

Section 4: Subject to this Act and of any written law, any claim against the Government which -

- (a) is founded on the use or occupation or the right to the use or occupation of State land; or
- (b) arises out of the revenue laws; or
- (c) arises out of any contract made by the authority of the Government which would, if such claim had arisen between subject and subject, afford ground for civil proceedings; or
- (d) is a claim (other than a claim in tort) for damages or compensation not included in the proceeding paragraphs which might lawfully be enforced by civil proceedings as between subject and subject,

shall be enforceable by proceedings against the Government for that purpose in accordance with this Act.

Liability of the Government in tort

Section 5: Subject to this Act, the Government shall be liable for any wrongful act done or any neglect or default committed by any public officer in the same manner and to the same extent as that in which a principal, being a private person, is liable for any wrongful act done, or any neglect or default committed by his

agent, and for the purposes of this section and without prejudice to the generality thereof, any public officer acting or purporting in good faith to be acting in pursuance of a duty imposed by law shall be deemed to be the agent of and to be acting under the instructions of the Government.

Limits of liability of the Government

Section 6.(1) No proceedings shall lie against the Government by virtue of section 5 in respect of any act, neglect or default of any public officer, unless proceedings for damages in respect of such act, neglect or default would have lain against such officer personally.

(2) Any written law which negatives or limits the amount of the liability of any public officer in respect of any act, neglect or default committed by that officer shall, in the case of proceedings against the Government under section 5 in respect of such act, neglect or default of such officer, apply in relation to the Government as it would have applied in relation to such officer if the proceedings against the Government had been proceedings against such officer.

- (3)
- (4)
- (5)

12. It is worthy of note that Act 359 was enacted in 1956 to amend and consolidate all laws relating to proceedings against the Federal and State Governments. This law contains substantive provisions creating rights to directly sue the Government and in case of tort to sue the Government vicariously. Section 4 of Act 359 prescribes that proceedings may be directly brought against the Government if the claim is

one relating to use or occupation or right to use or occupation of land; revenue matters, contractual; claims (other than tort) for damages or compensation lawfully enforced by civil proceedings as between subject and subject; whereas sections 5 and 6 provide for liability of the Government in tort. Thus, the case of **Attorney General v Hartwell**, supra, which imposed original liability for negligence against the Government of the British Virgin Islands in permitting PC Laurent to have access to a police firearm, is not quite relevant to our case as that case discussed the common law position which is not applicable in view of Act 359.

13. In **Haji Abdul Rahman**, supra, the plaintiff brought an action to recover damages arising out of a traffic accident in which an unlighted steam roller belonging to the Government had been left parked on the road at night. The deceased motorcyclist had crashed into it. One of the points taken by the defendant Government was that the action against the Government as principal was bad in law because the servant of the Government was not joined as a defendant to the action. Abdul Aziz J (later FJ) after stating sections 5 and 6 of Act 359 in his grounds of judgment concluded by saying, “the identity of the officer must be ascertained and the liability of the officer must be established before the Government can be made liable”.

14. However, the Court of Appeal did not agree with the High Court and preferred the decision of Chang Min Tat J (later FJ) in **Lai Seng & Co**, supra. That case concerned a dispute over

duties payable depending on the applicable taxing code to the plaintiff's goods. The defendants were the Government of Malaysia, Comptroller-General of Customs & Excise and Assistant-Comptroller of Customs & Excise, Penang and Butterworth. After filing a defence, Senior Federal Counsel filed an application to set aside the entire proceedings contending that the identity of the officer who applied taxing code must be ascertained. The learned judge though agreeing that the tortfeasor should be made a party took the view that the presence of the Government was sufficient. He relied on the Order 16 rule 11 of the Rules of the Supreme Court 1957 (which is equivalent to Order 15 rule 6(1) of the RHC) to prevent a defeat of an action by reason of misjoinder or nonjoinder of parties. He said :

“.... It is correct, I concede, that in action for tort, the proper defendant is the wrong-doer but the person who is liable for the acts of the wrong-doer or to whom the liability for the injury has passed is also a proper defendant, and for myself, I would adopt the attitude of Viscount Simon,

‘the courts before whom such a case as this comes have to decide it as between the parties before them’.

In *Adams v Naylor* [(1946) AC 543, 550] which is a case for damages for negligence but which must now be read subject to the qualification that since then the Crown Proceedings Act 1947 has come into force”.

15. It must be pointed out that the cases of **Haji Abdul Rahman** and **Lai Seng & Co**, supra, are easily distinguishable. In **Lai Seng & Co** the case was indeed properly brought

against the Government because the claim arose out of the revenue laws. Section 4 of Act 359 clearly allows such claim to be directly brought against the Government. However, in **Haji Abdul Rahman**, the action was one based in tort to which sections 4 and 5 of Act 359 apply. See **Steven Phoa Cheng Loon & Ors. v Highland Properties Sdn Bhd & Ors. (2000) 4 MLJ 200 at pp.285 to 287** where the same issue was successfully raised and not disturbed by the appellate courts.

16. Thus, I entirely agree with the views expressed by Abdul Aziz J (later FJ) in **Haji Abdul Rahman**, supra. Contrary to the finding of the Court of Appeal, **Haji Abdul Rahman** was correctly decided and should be upheld. Therefore, on the proper construction of sections 5 and 6 of Act 359, in any claim in tort against the Government, the officer of the Government who was responsible for the alleged tortious act must be made a party and his liability be established before the Government can be made liable vicariously as principal. It would be insufficient to merely identify the officer without joining the officer as a party because liability by evidence needs to be established. It is only upon a successful claim against the officer personally can a claim be laid against the Government.

17. In the present case, all the eight causes of actions are actions in tort or tort-based premised on the act or omission of an individual. None of the Governments sued is capable of committing the wrong pleaded. Since the Governments' liability in tort can only be vicarious by virtue of sections 5 and 6 of Act 359, and as the officers who were responsible for the alleged

wrongdoing were not joined as defendants to the action, it is therefore not possible in law to maintain a successful claim in tort against the Governments as primary tortfeasors. That being so, the appellants' application to strike out the respondents' actions is meritorious.

18. However, that is not the end of the matter. The Court of Appeal applied Order 15 rule 6(1) of the RHC not to defeat the respondents' action for the misjoinder or nonjoinder of parties as applied in **Lai Seng & Co.** In this respect, I agree with the appellants that this is not just a case of joining wrong parties but bringing an action against the wrong parties. The four appellants are the sole parties here and if the action is dismissed against them there are no other parties against whom the case can proceed.

19. Thus, my answer to Question (1) is in the positive while Questions (2) and (4) are in the negative.

Questions (3) and (5)

20. These two questions arose as a result of the finding of the Court of Appeal which ruled that the defence of limitation is a defence which must be put down in writing as part of a pleaded case. The Court then proceeded to discuss the matter in the context of continuing injury concluding that whether the case is in fact one of continuing injury is one for trial.

21. To lend support of the above finding, the respondents submitted that it is not appropriate to strike out the claim for limitation of time as it is not blatant that the respondents are

impeded by a time bar. The causes of actions are based on a continuum of acts and omissions of the appellants that span the period from September 1998 to May 1999. And since the writ was filed on 20.03.2002 the claim was well within the 3 year period as provided for under section 2(a) of the PAPA. As such, learned counsel for the respondents urged the court not to shut out the respondents from pursuing their claims and asked the appellants to file their defence forthwith.

22. With respect, I do not agree. I agree with the appellants that the respondents' pleadings reveal that the claim is not one of continuous tort but relates to specific acts or omissions, namely : failing to take steps to determine the cause of the outbreak of the virus; acting on erroneous assumptions; failing to give consideration to virologist, Jane Cardoza; failing to refer or send samples to the right experts for examination; implementing unsuitable measures to manage and control the virus (see paragraphs 88, 90, 96, 97, 124.3 and 124.13 of the statement of claim). All these events happened earlier than 1.3.1999 when the virus was isolated. The decisions made on 18.3.1999 and 19.3.1999 to cull the pigs were actually not challenged. Therefore, since the suit was filed on 20.3.2002, the action was clearly time barred as it was filed out of time.

23. Regarding the issue of limitation of time, the Court of Appeal appears to interpret it as barring remedy but not the right to sue. That is not correct. In so far as PAPA is concerned, the law is settled. The Privy Council in **Yew Bon Tew & Anor v Kenderaan Bas Mara (1983) 1 MLJ 1** at p 6

held that limitation under PAPA is “just as much a “right” as any other statutory or contractual protection against a future suit”.

24. In this respect, both the Court of Appeal and the Federal Court have consistently struck out claims when it was clear that the statute of limitations would be relied on or raised. In **Alias bin Ismail v Hairuddin bin Mohamad & Anor (1997) 3 MLJ 724** the Court of Appeal held that the court has no discretion to set aside a defence of limitation. It was open to the defendant on an application to dismiss an action as being frivolous and vexatious or an abuse of the process of the court to show the plaintiff’s cause of action was statute-barred and must fail for that reason.

25. In **Haji Hussin bin Haji Ali & Ors v Datuk Haji Mohamed bin Yaacob & Ors and connected cases (1983) 2 MLJ 227**, the appellants there filed suits against the Menteri Besar, the State Secretary and the Government of Kelantan alleging that their dismissal as penghulus was unconstitutional and unlawful. The respondents did not file a defence but applied for the writ to be struck out on the grounds that it disclosed no reasonable causes of action, was frivolous, vexatious, irregular, null and void and that it was otherwise an abuse of the court process. It was averred that the actions were filed too late as they were statute-barred by the PAPA. The writs were struck out by the High Court. On appeal, learned counsel for the appellants argued that the defence of limitations had to be pleaded. The Federal Court in dismissing the appeal and affirming the striking out order, said at p 231 :

“We need not go further than to refer to the judgment of this Court in *Tio Chee Hing & Ors v Government of Sabah* [1981] 1 MLJ 207 where this court referred to the Court of Appeal decision in *Riches v Director of Public Prosecutions* [1973] 2 All ER 935, 939 which decided that where it is clear that the defendant was going to rely on the statute of limitations and there was nothing before the court to suggest that the plaintiffs could escape from it, the claim would be struck out. An extract from the judgment of Davis L.J. at page 939 is relevant :

“In the light of those more recent authorities I think, as I say, that perhaps the observations of this court in *Dismore v Milton* went too far. I do not want to state definitely that, in a case where it is merely alleged that the Statement of Claim discloses no cause of action, the limitation objection should or would prevail. In principle, I cannot see why not. If there is any room for an escape from the statute, well and good; it can be shown. But in the absence of that, it is difficult to see why a defendant should be called on to pay large sums of money and a plaintiff be permitted to waste large sums of his own or somebody else’s money in an attempt to pursue a cause of action which has already been barred by the statute of limitations and must fail.” ”

26. Likewise, in the present action, it was clear that the appellants were going to rely on limitation and there was no way that the respondents could have escaped from it. Thus, a

defendant on an application to strike out pleadings and indorsements under Order 18 rule 19(1) of the RHC is entitled to raise limitation of action without pleading a defence and filing it to that effect. Similarly, in the present case, the appellants were entitled to do the same, and since the respondents' action was clearly statute-barred, the action was therefore properly struck out.

27. Besides, there is also another matter under section 7(5) and (3B) of the CLA which needs to be clarified. In the High Court the respondents had conceded that this section applied against 5 of the respondents. Despite this, the respondents still wanted the court to convert the claims from dependency to estate claims. Clearly this is not proper as such actions are further prohibited by principles concerning capacity and the right to sue.
28. In the instant case, it is to be noted that the Court of Appeal had considered only on the issue of limitation under the PAPA whereas the PCIDA, the CLA and the AA were not considered at all, though they were relied on by the appellants as parts of the grounds to strike out the respondents' action. That being the case, the Court of Appeal had erred in its decision in not holding the claims were barred not only under section 2(a) of the PAPA, but also under the specific laws of section 4 of the PCIDA, section 7(5) and (3B) of the CLA and sections 36(8) and 78 of the AA.
29. The relevant provisions of the PCIDA and the AA are as follows :

Sections 4(1) of the PCIDA

“Nothing done by any authorized officer for the purpose of executing this Act and the regulations made thereunder shall subject the authorized officer personally to any action, liability, claim or demand whatsoever.”

Section 36(8) of the AA

“No compensation shall be payable for any animal, bird or carcass destroyed or seized under this section.”

Section 78 of the AA

“(1) Any action taken under this Act or of any order, rule, or direction made or given under it in respect of any animal, bird, carcass, article, building or conveyance shall be at the risk of its owner.

(2) No liability shall attach to any Government or to any officer in respect of any expense, loss, damage or delay arising in or from the lawful exercise of the powers conferred by this Act.”

30. Section 78(1) and (2) of the AA provide protection by way of imposing at the owner’s own risk and with no liability attached to the action taken by the Government or its officers under the AA. Such prohibition extends to allegations of delay in carrying out the action which was substantially the nature of the respondents’ claim. Section 36(8) of the AA takes away the right to compensation. See also section 4(1) of the PCIDA. By their provisions, it is clear policy that both PCIDA and the AA are to exclude liability and compensation.

31. In the claim it was alleged that there was a failure or omission to use statutory duties imposed under PCIDA. This is incorrect as PCIDA does not impose any on the appellants but instead imposes on certain members of the public to do certain acts (see sections 10, 12, 13 and 17 of the PCIDA). For example, section 10(2) of the PCIDA imposes an obligation on medical practitioners to inform the existence of any infectious disease to the nearest Medical Officer of Health. Failure to do this act amounts to an offence. However, none of the above provisions impose an obligation on the appellants. The appellants' legal duty must either be imposed by statute or under common law. Since there is none under either, the action for breach of statutory duties is clearly frivolous and misconceived and must therefore be struck out (see **X & Ors (minors) v Bedfordshire County Council & Other appeals (1995) 3 All ER 353 HL; E v K (1995) 2 NZLR 239**).
32. Hence, these provisions under PCIDA and AA offer absolute protection to the appellants against the respondents' claim, especially since the orders made by the respective Menteri Besars have not been challenged. Thus, the reference to the House of Lords' case of **Arthur J S Hall v Simons (2000) 3 All ER 673** by the Court of Appeal for the proposition that "current English authority leaning against the grant of blanket immunity at the interlocutory stage results in issues of public interest being remitted to the trial stage" is misplaced as there is clear statutory prohibition of actions and claims against the appellants under the PCIDA and the AA.

33. Further, I agree with the appellants that even without the above statutory protections, the law is also quite clear that the respondents' claim are unsustainable and therefore must be struck out *in limine*.
34. The losses claimed in this action were occasioned by the disease be it of the JE or Nipah virus. The loss was not occasioned by the appellants at all. But it was alleged by the respondents that the losses suffered by them was caused by the delay on the part of the appellants in taking the necessary measures or due to the inefficiency of the appellants.
35. However, delay in taking action or the exercise of any power is not actionable as the losses would have occurred in any event. In **The Administration of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea v Leahy (1960-1961) 105 CLR 6**, the High Court of Australia dismissed an action brought to recover damages for cattle that had died from tick infection. The action was one under contract but even if made under tort the claim would still have been dismissed. At p 12 the High Court applied the principle in **East Suffolk Rivers Catchment Board v Kent (1941) A.C.74** which said :
- “.... where a statutory authority is entrusted with a power and exercises that power, **the only duty which it owes to a member of the public is not to add to the damages which that person would have suffered had the authority done nothing.** In that case the appellants, who were vested with statutory powers under the Land Drainage Act, 1930 (Imp.), undertook the repair of a sea wall but carried out the work inefficiently. The consequence was that the respondents' land was flooded for a longer period of time that it would have been if

reasonable skill had been exercised. It was held that the appellants were under no liability to the respondents as the damage suffered by the latter was due to natural causes.

In the present case the loss suffered by Leahy through the death of his cattle from red-water fever was due to tick infestation. The officers of the Administration exercised their powers for a period in a very inefficient manner through not carrying out the treatment properly. However, the cause of the loss was not the default of the Administration but a natural cause – the tick infestation – and therefore the respondent has not proved that the appellant has broken a duty of care leading to loss on his part.”

(emphasis added)

36. Not too long ago attempts to impose a common law duty even in cases where there is statutory duty has consistently not found favour with the courts. In **Stovin v Wise (1996) A.C. 923** the House of Lords said at p 953 :

“.... If the policy of the Act is not to create a statutory liability to pay compensation, the same policy should ordinarily exclude the existence of a common law duty of care.”

37. This principle was applied in **Gorringe v Calderdate Metropolitan Borough Council (2004) 2 All ER 326** where the House of Lords opined at p 336 :

“[25] In the absence of a right to sue for breach of the statutory duty itself, **it would in my opinion have been absurd to hold that the council was nevertheless under a common law duty to take reasonable care** to provide accommodation for homeless persons whom it could reasonably foresee would otherwise be reduced to sleeping rough. And the argument would in my opinion have been even weaker if the council, instead of being

under a duty to provide accommodation, merely had power to do so.”

(emphasis added)

38. In **Capital and Counties plc v Hampshire County Council & Ors (1997) 2 All ER 865** the English Court of Appeal reiterated the principle in **Gorringe**, supra, when it heard jointly 3 appeals concerning delay in action on the part of the fire fighting authorities. The claims were struck out on the ground of no cause of action. On appeal, the Court of Appeal affirmed the decision and applied **East Suffolk Rivers**, supra and ruled at p 878 :

“In our judgment the fire brigade are not under a common law duty to answer the call for help and are not under a duty to take care to do so. If therefore they fail to turn up or fail to turn up in time because they have carelessly misunderstood the message, got lost on the way or run into a tree, they are not liable.”

39. Thus, having regard to the foregoing reasons, the Court of Appeal was erroneous in concluding that this case was inappropriate to be summarily struck out. The respondents' case was so untenable and doomed to failure both on the facts and the law. The striking out order of the respondents' action under Order 18 rule 19(1) of the RHC on the grounds advanced by the appellants was therefore correct.

40. Hence, my answers to Questions (3) and (5) are in the positive and negative respectively.

Conclusion

41. All the five questions of law have been answered. Accordingly, I allow the appeal with costs. The orders of the Court of Appeal are hereby set aside. The orders of the SAR and the High Court are restored and affirmed.
42. My learned brother Arifin Zakaria Chief Judge (Malaya) and my learned brother Zulkefli FCJ have read this judgment in draft and have expressed their agreement with it.

30 October 2008

(Dato' Bentara Istana Dato' Nik Hashim bin Nik Ab. Rahman)
 Judge
 Federal Court,
 Malaysia

Counsel:

- | | | |
|---------------------|---|---|
| For the appellants | : | Dato' Mary Lim Thiam Suan
Amarjeet Singh
Senior Federal Counsel |
| Solicitors | : | Peguan Negara Malaysia |
| For the respondents | : | Malik Imtiaz Sarwan
Ser Choon Ing
Neoh Hor Kee
Sivarasa Rasiah |
| Solicitors | : | Ser & Co. |

