

Najib trains sight on Khalid, Anwar
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Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has claimed that PKR treasurer Khalid Ibrahim joined the opposition party not over principles, but following his disappointment with the government in not giving him a bigger stake in plantation giant Guthrie.

Najib said Khalid, a former chief executive of Permodalan Nasional Berhad (PNB), was disgruntled with the government after failing to acquire a 20 percent stake in plantation giant Guthrie Bhd.

"Khalid was angry with us because he had wanted a bigger equity share. This is not slander, we have proof. Khalid only wanted to hog the wealth for himself," said Najib during a speech in Ijok town last night.

The 'proof', said Najib, came in form of the first PNB CEO Mohd Desa Pachi.

According to Bernama, Mohd Desa was in attendance and seen nodding approvingly during Najib's speech. But when approached by reporters later, Mohd Desa declined comment.

Najib, who is leading the BN campaign for the Ijok by-election this Saturday, said Khalid was trying to privately own shares that were held in trust for the poor.

"Who says he took a small bite; looks like he bit off a huge chunk. Guthrie shares should by right be utilised for the unit trusts for the people, both bumiputeras and non-bumiputeras," he said to a crowd of some 500 people.

The truth

Najib said that since 1994, Khalid had the desire to own a 20 percent personal stake in Guthrie and had initially asked for a 6.5 per cent equity in the company.

"As the deputy prime minister, I received much information from various sources that were brought to my attention. For that amount (6.5 percent) of shares, he (Khalid) had to seek a loan of RM175 million," he said.

Khalid had held the post of Guthrie CEO from 1995 to 2003. He joined PKR last year and apart from being the treasurer, he is also the party's Selangor chief.

Najib said that after obtaining the 6.5 percent stake, Khalid then sought to own 13.5 percent more equity in Guthrie.

"This is the truth. He had difficulty to settle his loan (to obtain the remainder of the shares). Then he asked for an extension of the payment period but could not pay according to that schedule. We extended (the period) again but he could not pay as well.

"Finally, when the term was up he was unable to acquire the shares and was angry with the BN government," he said.

Anwar was involved too

Najib also accused former deputy premier and PKR advisor Anwar Ibrahim of abetting Khalid in gaining hold of Guthrie shares.

He said Anwar had wrote to then PNB chairperson Ismail Ali stating his approval for Khalid to obtain the shares.

"The person who wrote to Ismail was Anwar. If we want to talk about it, there's a lot to talk about, more interesting, more colourful... Let's face it, the people of Ijok should not be conned like this," he said.

"Anwar now claim New Economic Policy only benefitted a select few. Pegi-dah! Podah! Podah! (Get lost). This is a lie! Why didn't he do anything when he was in power?"

"Instead, he used his power to enrich the opposition candidate who is contesting here," added Najib.

Khalid to sue Najib

In an immediate response, Khalid today refuted Najib's claims and disclaimed Anwar of any involvement in the deal.

"The idea of obtaining share options of Kumpulan Guthrie Bhd was first suggested to me by the late Ismail in 1994, and was agreed by the chairperson of Yayasan Pelaburan Bumiputera and then Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"I acquired them at market price and it was a commercial transaction, not free or discounted shares as allocated by the Ministry of International Trade and Investment," said Khalid in a statement today.

Khalid added that the matter was still pending in court and any questions pertaining to the deal should rightly be dealt there.

He added that he had instructed his lawyers to initiate a defamation suit against Najib over the remarks that were deemed 'false and unfounded'.

"These malicious attacks are pathetic attempts by the DPM to divert criticisms of his own corruption scandals," he added.

Meanwhile, Anwar said he had never been asked by Khalid to approve any shares or allocation for personal benefit.

"The false and wicked accusations by Najib Razak and his coterie to smear Khalid's good name are desperate attempts to cover up his and the BN government's blatant abuse of power and public funds," said Anwar in a separate statement today.

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