

PM denies meddling in Felda court cases

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By Nigel Aw

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has denied PKR allegations that he had instructed Felda officials to influence judges presiding over cases relating to lawsuits against Felda for allegedly cheating palm oil planters on the oil extraction rate (OER) of their produce.

“This is a complete distortion of facts,” he said after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting last night in Kuala Lumpur.

NONEHowever, the premier declined to elaborate, stating that Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Ahmad Maslan, who is in charge of Felda issues, will address the matter in Parliament next week.

On Monday, PKR secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution had revealed the minutes of a meeting held between Najib and Felda officials at Parliament June last year which stated that Felda must ensure that “judges and lawyers” are given understanding into the technical aspects of the case.

The document further states they must “ensure that Felda wins this case so that future cases will not be affected”.

This, Saifuddin claimed, was evidence that the premier has attempted to influence three such cases which are currently pending in court.

In recent years, Felda and Felda Palm Industries Sdn Bhd had faced a series of lawsuits for allegedly cheating settlers of their palm oil produce by undervaluing the OER rate of palm oil planters from whom they purchase their produce.

Three such cases are currently pending in court, two of which are the lawsuit filed by 766 settlers from Serting Hilir and the Raja Alias Felda settlements against Felda, in the Seremban High Court; and another suit by 645 settlers from the Maokil Felda settlement, filed in the Johor Baru High Court.

The third and most recent case was filed on behalf of some 1,000 settlers from the Jengka settlement at the Temerloh High Court and a fourth for the Chini settlers is expected to be filed soon.

‘Up to PSC to decide stop order on Lynas’

On a separate issue, asked if a stop order should be issued against Lynas’ rare earths processing plant in Gebeng, Kuantan as a parliamentary select committee (PSC) has been set up to look into the project, Najib said: “That is up to the PSC to deliberate”.

NONENajib had said that the PSC will merely serve to create awareness and will not have a say in the fate of the RM700 million plant.

This has prompted Pakatan Rakyat to boycott the PSC after it was set up by Parliament on Tuesday, by staging a walkout.

Meanwhile, according to Bernama, Najib also said he is not worried over the personal attacks launched by the opposition against him.

Describing the attacks as normal in politics, the prime minister said his attackers were not in any better situation themselves.

Asked on the issue of leakage of government information, Najib said the government strived to stop that from happening but in a borderless world, it was not an easy thing to do.

Asked to comment on if Australia's proposed asylum seeker swap deal with Malaysia was back on the agenda, the prime minister said he did not have any latest information on the matter.

"The ball is very much in their court. I cannot comment...it is up to them to deliver their side of the bargain."

Australia's new Foreign Minister Bob Carr on Thursday night said that the proposed asylum seeker swap deal with Malaysia was back on the agenda as Parliament debates legislation to amend the Migration Act.

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