

## **Najib, wife 'hire' lawyer for mystery overseas assignment**

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**By S Pathmawathy**

High-profile Umno lawyer Muhammad Shafee Abdullah has been appointed by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and his wife Rosmah Mansor for a three-week confidential overseas assignment.

He has requested for all his cases from April 2 to 25 to be vacated in a letter dated March 23, and addressed to Chief Justice Ariffin Zakaria, Court of Appeal president Md Raus Sharif and Chief Judge of Malaya Zulkefli Ahmad Makinuddin, and copies sent to the prime minister and his wife.

NONEPortions of the letter were revealed to the Dewan Rakyat by Saifuddin Nasution (PKR-Machang) (left) during the debate on the Penal Code (Amendments) 2012 today.

Shafee said he had been "appointed on behalf of the government of Malaysia, in particular Najib and Rosmah, to undertake a sensitive legal assignment overseas that must be completed before the general election.

"This would entail travel to three cities - New York, London and Dubai, and possibly Paris - for a span of at least three weeks, and over this course of time (I) would be involved in intensive legal preparations such as negotiating with parties and their witnesses, drafting claims and affidavits and interviewing witnesses who are in New York, London, Paris or Basel (Switzerland)."

There is speculation that Shafee's trip may have links with the ongoing French investigation on alleged corruption into the purchase of two Scorpene submarines by Malaysia, which may also cast more light on the murder of aspiring model and translator Altantuya Shaariibuu six years ago.

The opposition MP then attempted to link the matter to amendments in the Penal Code, which was in debate, referring to 'activities detrimental to parliamentary democracy'.

"If a person were to possess a document which details that a lawyer engaged by the prime minister had sent a letter to the Chief Justice of Malaysia asking that his cases be adjourned because he is embarking on a sensitive legal assignment which must be finished before the general election and requires him to go to cities around the world like Paris, New York, Basel and Dubai, can the person being in possession of such document be judged under provisions of detrimental to parliamentary democracy?" he asked.

Saifuddin, at first, did not mention the identity of the lawyer involved. However, after being pressed by Gobind Singh Deo (DAP-Puchong), he claimed that Shafee was acting on the instructions of Najib and Rosmah.

No comment till letter verified

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz, in an immediate response, said he could not comment on the issue until the letter was verified.

This prompted deputy speaker Ronald Kiandee, who was presiding during the debate, to warn Saifuddin to be certain of the authenticity and the veracity of the document cited.

Saifuddin confidently stood up and said he had done his homework and assured that the alleged letter was sent from Shafee's office.

In winding up the policy stage debate, R Sivarasa (PKR-Subang) intervened to bring up the topic again to Nazri.

The de facto law minister then denied Shafee was engaged by the government of Malaysia.

"We never appointed him. That was clear when the name of the prime minister's wife was mentioned.

"The government cannot appoint a lawyer to represent the prime minister's wife," said Nazri.

Pressing further, Sivarasa then asked Nazri if the lawyer had committed an offence, and who replied: "He might have misrepresented himself, but this is not unconstitutional."

Therefore, the minister said that Shafee's alleged "misrepresentation" does not relate to 'activities that were detrimental to parliamentary democracy' which was being discussed under the Penal Code amendments.

He described the contents of the letter as a "personal action of the prime minister's private lawyer".

The amendment to the Penal Code, which is currently in its committee stage, was tabled together with the amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) and the Evidence Act which complements the Security Offences (Special Measures) 2012 Bill.

After two days of intense debate the Security Offences Bill, a replacement to the archaic Internal Security Act 1960, was passed today.

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