

PMO blasé on Rosmah's 'jewellery invoices'

MalaysiaKini.com

Feb 17, 2015

By Kuek Ser Kuang Keng

A week ago, the New York Times featured a front-page article about 33-year-old tycoon Jho Low, a member of Malaysia's new rich with close ties to Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's family.

The article looked into Low's purchase of million-dollar properties in New York City, which was later sold to Riza Aziz, the son of Najib's wife Rosmah Mansor from another marriage.

Naturally, the journalists involved in the story dug into the source of wealth of Najib's family, given that Najib is a career politician, holding various offices since he was 23, beginning as the Pekan MP.

Among others, the NYT journalists raised numerous questions in their article, including several invoices showing millions of dollars' worth of jewellery that were, according to the report, meant for Rosmah.

But strangely, when the NTY journalists queried the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) about these invoices, the PMO didn't even bother to ask for details.

In an interview with the two journalists who wrote the story - Louise Story and Stephanie Saul - the PMO's office reply was that Najib had received an inheritance and had also enjoyed "legacy family assets".

"We told them that we had these documents and the documents show millions of dollars of jewellery purchase in 2008, 2009 and we asked them for comments.

"They did not ask to see the documents, so we did not show them, and we included their reply," said Story.

'RM13mil on jewellery purchases'

According to NYT, the PMO had replied, "Neither any money spent on travel, nor any jewellery purchases, nor the alleged contents of any safes are unusual for a person of the prime minister's position, responsibilities and legacy family assets."

The purchase of multi-million jewellery for Rosmah first surfaced in early 2013 when businessman carpet trader Deepak Jaikishin alleged that he paid RM13 million to purchase jewellery for her in 2008 and 2009.

The safes referred to an allegation by Ariff Sabri Abdul Aziz, the Raub MP who was the information chief of Umno Pekan division from 2000 to 2004. Najib is the division chief

since 1982.

Ariff Sabri, who left Umno for DAP in early 2012, told NYT that Najib kept “piles and piles” of ringgit notes stacked in his safe.

The NYT piece on Low was part of a five-part series on the individuals behind more than 200 shell companies which own ultra-luxury condominiums at Time Warner Center, an iconic high-end retail and residential building in the heart of New York.

Story (right), who was in Malaysia last July to carry out her investigations, said she had made multiple requests to interview Low, Najib and Riza to no avail.

“Ultimately we sent them very, very detail questions outlining a lot of things that we found in our reporting and then we gave them a lot of time to answer,” said the award-winning journalist.

‘It was like a big puzzle’

Eventually, the trio supplied answers to almost all the questions, she said, including the source of Najib’s wealth.

“We told him (Najib) that we had heard he did not receive a large inheritance and that Ms Rosmah did not come from much money and then we asked him for comment on that.

“He replied that he had received inheritance and also his legacy family assets,” she said.

Other than Low, NYT also found other wealthy foreigners behind the purchase of the condominiums including government officials and their close associates from Russia, Colombia, China, Kazakhstan and Mexico.

At least 16 of them were the subject of government inquiries around the world. Four owners have been arrested, and another four have been the subject of fines or penalties for illegal activities, according to the report.

Story and Saul told Malaysiakini that the most difficult part of the investigation was to find evidence and link them together to find out the real owners of the different forms of corporate entities that purchase the condominiums in the Time Warner Center (left).

“The focus of our story initially was to look at one building, and look at who were behind the companies or corporate entities in that building.

“Our focus point did not start out with anything to do with Malaysia. It just happened that a couple of the apartments there tied to people from Malaysia after we started looking into them,” said Saul.

“(It was) like a big puzzle - the whole building was a puzzle - and we had to fill in the

identities of the individuals to get the information that we need.”

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/289524>