

Be honourable Muslims and resign, TH execs

MalaysiaKini.com

May 10, 2015

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COMMENT Lembaga Tabung Haji (The Pilgrimage Fund or TH) by its very name conveys a strong meaning. 'Haj', being the fifth pillar in Islam, in itself is a powerful word in the Muslim world.

It is Man's direct connection with God and considered the final commitment to one's faith. It is the day where Man gather in the barren field of Arafah to invoke God's mercy seeking atonement for his sins.

But in the recent Tun Razak Exchange (TRX) land deal with 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB), it is not about the barren land nor a penance for sins.

It is about plundering the pilgrims' trust fund to fill the coffers of those who have been shown to splurge it on expensive champagne or debauched parties and questionable investments.

The sale of the 1.56 acres land to TH for RM188 million, yielding 1MDB hundreds of times more profit, is an outright sin. Muslims are proud of their Islamic honour and yet this can happen so blatantly to those placed in trust of such a fund used for religious purposes.

If a Japanese can commit harakiri to retain honour, and a South Korean prime minister can resign following a ferry tragedy, why couldn't the senior executives in TH who are also members of the board of directors of 1MDB who had approved the purchase of the controversial TRX deal do the same thing?

Resign now and facilitate investigations; have you no honour or shame to fellow Muslims?

The act of buying the said land from 1MDB, and then selling back the land, shows something is amiss or seriously wrong with the purchase in the first place.

The fact that the Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has ordered the re-selling of the land does not absolve the four in TH - chairperson Abdul Azeez Abdul Rahim, group managing director, CEO Ismee Ismail, investment panel member Abdul Samad Alias and deputy group managing director and deputy CEO Johan Abdullah - whom are all office holders in 1MDB.

This also does not clear Najib as the finance minister, whose ministry also runs and owns 1MDB and whom as the Umno president is an adviser.

In fact, it leads to more grounds to and lends credence to former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad's urging for Najib to be removed following unexplained factors surrounding 1MDB's RM42 billion debts.

Clear your names and if you are not at fault, you can climb back up the ladder. That is the honourable thing to do!

Not sit behind your desk or rest on your laurels, claiming that you were not involved in the meeting or decision. Is this the Umno way of doing things, Mr PM and Abdul Azeez, MP for Baling Umno supreme council member, in clearing someone?

Absence doesn't absolve

This follows claims that three TH officers namely Ismee, Johan and Samad Alias who are also linked to 1MDB or its subsidiaries, are said to have abstained or had not been present in the meeting related to the land purchase.

Even in football games there is a referee to investigate a foul. Imagine Manchester United legend Eric Cantona, whose team the PM dearly supports, saying, "I was instigated by the fans in performing the flying kick on the crowd and it is all right." No need for the English FA or referee to give him a red card.

Surely there must be some person or entity to investigate if there is a wrongdoing or otherwise? It should not be the same person in an organisation clearing themselves. Even the Islamic way is to call for four credible witnesses to verify claims and a judge to oversee such proceedings, what more a matter involving managing a pilgrimage fund.

Doesn't Abdul Azeez as chairperson of TH know this basic law? In such a big case, we cannot depend solely on minutes of meetings, as they can be tampered with. There must be an independent organisation to probe it.

Form a royal commission of inquiry (RCI) and suspend those involved in the interim, including Najib.

If everything is above board, then why are other senior Umno members ranging from Mahathir (who called the land purchase a 1MDB bailout), Najib's deputy Muhyiddin Yassin, the PM's cousin Hishammuddin Hussein to Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar and Kedah Menteri Besar Mukhriz Mahathir questioning it?

Even PAS leaders are crying foul over the purchase, and Perlis mufti Asri Zainul Abidin is asking that court action be taken against the trio.

To top it off, even pop diva Siti Nurhaliza also described what is happening as shameful.

For these reasons, those involved including Najib, Abdul Azeez and the three must go until everything is cleared up. Have independent persons appointed to investigate, or have a royal commission of inquiry to go through the documents, the CCTV recordings of 'who is who' in the 1MDB meeting and TH board meeting in allowing the purchase.

Otherwise questions will persist, as Bukit Bendera MP Zairil Khir Johari had pointed out.

Najib as an adviser to 1MDB certainly has an interests in this, and Abdul Azeez is responsible in quickly denying claims of the purchase being made at an inflated price.

IGP must get priorities right

Inspector-general of police (IGP) Khalid Abu Bakar was quick to comment yesterday that police would investigate who had leaked the information regarding the purchase. I think the IGP is missing the point as to which is the greater offence.

Is the bigger offence the alleged suspicious nature of the land purchase, or the information leak?

So is the IGP now insinuating that protecting a potential alleged criminal offence is all right in the police's eyes? Don't we have the Whistleblower Protection Act 2010 in use? Why try and punish those who revealed such alleged wrongdoings?

Surprisingly, opposition politicians and non-Muslim politicians like Lim Kit Siang and Gobind Singh Deo are the ones who see something is wrong with the IGP's statement.

And even Umno Youth information chief Jamawi Jaafar hailed the leak that brought the scandal to public attention.

"As a depositor with Tabung Haji, I have a right to ask, if the information was not leaked, then surely our savings would have been used to purchased 1MDB's land in TRX (Tun Razak Exchange)?" he said.

Such statements lend credence to questions whether the IGP is someone's lackey.

Depositors deserve accountability

In conclusion, and as a Tabung Haji depositor along with my family, I feel those responsible either directly or indirectly for the purchase, be it in TH or 1MDB, should resign or be suspended from their posts to facilitate independent and transparent investigations.

As depositors we want to see the RM188 million paid out for the purchase be fully recovered by the end of the month. We live in the 21st century where transparency and accountability are sacred, what more in Islam!

Do not hide behind your songkok or skullcap to show you are religious, whereas your actions are deemed otherwise. Let's get things straight: selling the land back is not good enough, there must be accountability and someone held responsible for this caper that has angered depositors. Heads must roll.

Remember these deposits in TH come from hard toil and the blood, sweat and tears of people who work as fishermen, padi farmers, labourers, factory workers as well as

professionals who harbour hope of performing the haj, the fifth pillar of Islam.

People invest or put their lifetime savings there to realise such hopes. TH has been a success and a shining beacon and is an example to all Muslim countries – that was before this caper in attempting to save 1MDB came to light.

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