

'If TH deal so good, why did Najib ask to sell?'

MalaysiaKini.com

May 11, 2015

By Zikri Kamarulzaman

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak should have defended the controversial Tabung Haji land purchase if it was good for the pilgrimage fund, said veteran newsman A Kadir Jasin.

Kadir, who is a relentless Najib critic, said it was ironic for the premier to advise Tabung Haji to resell the land it had bought from 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) and then explain the purchase's virtues.

"It is ironic that he advised Tabung Haji to sell the land and later said it was a good deal and would bring a lot of profit to Tabung Haji.

"If the land deal (with 1MDB) is so good for Tabung Haji, he should be defending the deal, not asking Tabung Haji to give up on the deal," he told Malaysiakini today.

On Saturday, Tabung Haji chairperson Abdul Azeez Abdul Rahim said Najib had advised the fund to liquidate the Tun Razak Exchange (TRX) land it had bought for RM188.5 million as a move to placate critics.

Then on Sunday, the prime minister said the move would be a loss for Tabung Haji depositors, as the fund will only make between RM5 million to RM6 million from the sale now, instead of the potential profit of up to RM170 million.

Najib was the last top Umno leader to comment on the issue after it was leaked that the fund had bought the land for around 37 times what 1MDB had paid the government for several years ago.

He had initially remained silent as top Umno leaders including deputy president Muhyiddin Yassin joined the chorus of indignation over the deal when news of it emerged.

Breaking silence in Sabah

This has fuelled speculation that the scandal may be the tipping point in efforts to oust Najib from power.

Speaking to a 40,000 strong crowd in Tawau yesterday to rally party support, Najib however insisted that he will continue to lead the country as long as he has support from the rakyat and Umno.

"If he thinks that whatever happens he can still rule effectively, that is up to him," Kadir said in response.

"(If Najib said he has support) the next opportunity to gauge Najib's popularity, to gauge

the support of Umno members is at the next party election," he said.

On why Najib had gone to Sabah before breaking his silence on the controversy, the former New Straits Times editor-in-chief said it is because the premier cannot whip up a similar crowd in the Peninsular.

"It is much more difficult to get such a large crowd in the Peninsular, the Peninsular Umno members are getting tired of these solidarity gatherings," he said.

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