

WSJ didn't implicate PM, says Tajuddin

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By Kow Gah Chie

Another Umno supreme council member has dismissed calls for Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to take leave pending an investigation into claims that nearly US\$700 million was transferred into his personal bank account.

This because the report by The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) never implicated Najib, but instead implicated 1MDB, Deputy Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Minister Tajuddin Abdul Rahman claimed.

He said his interpretation of the WSJ report led him to understand that 1MDB was alleged to have transferred the money, adding that the company has denied the claim.

"So why must Najib go on leave? He isn't being investigated," Tajuddin (photo) told Malaysiakini in a phone interview.

Several NGOs and opposition parties have urged Najib to go on leave pending investigation into the 1MDB funds allegation in order to ensure that there is no interference.

Najib has accused former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad of being behind the allegations and is said to be weighing his legal options against WSJ.

Tajuddin said Najib now has no choice but to sue for defamation, even if the process is bound to take a long time.

By taking WSJ to court, the onus would be on the newspaper to prove its allegation, he said, while stressing that everyone is innocent until proven guilty.

Taking legal action is also important because WSJ's allegation was affecting Najib's reputation, and because Malaysians have a habit of indulging in hearsay, he added.

"There is this tendency for people to listen to rumours and unverified allegations. They may be influenced. As a result, they may not be happy with the leadership and the government.

"In the long run, the situation will change if the truth prevails. But it takes time to prove what is true," Tajuddin said.

No need for Najib to show bank accounts

Asked if Najib should reveal his bank statements to clear any doubt, Tajuddin said this was not necessary.

"The issue now is that company money was in the account. The taskforce is investigating this," he said, adding that the public may not necessarily believe the bank statements to be true.

He added that bank statements should only be tendered as evidence if the matter is brought to court.

Tajuddin also denied talk that Umno leaders were called for an emergency meeting at Najib's official residence on Sunday night.

He said there was no need for any emergency meeting as the prime minister was handling the matter appropriately.

Asked if Mahathir should be arrested, since he has been accused of masterminding a plot against Najib, Tajuddin replied in the negative.

"We are not happy with what he is saying, but it does not necessarily mean we want to see him arrested," he said.

Dr M must be handled differently

Tajuddin said that everyone in Malaysia must be treated equally, but as a former prime minister, Mahathir must be handled differently.

"In reality, we need to observe certain adab (etiquette) .

"There's a way how to treat people like Mahathir. I am sure the authorities know how to handle him," he said.

In recent months, Mahathir has shaped himself into becoming the chief critic of the 1MDB scandal to which he links Najib, who also finance minister and chairs the 1MDB board of advisors.

Mahathir also wants Najib to explain how the company, owned by the finance ministry, racked up RM42 billion in debts, a portion of which is guaranteed by Putrajaya.