

Is it 'Game Over' for Najib?

MalaysiaKini.com

July 7, 2015

By Norman Goh

After being dealt a devastating blow last week, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's career, according to certain quarters, is on tenterhooks.

The Wall Street Journal reported that RM2.6 billion of 1MDB funds were transferred into the personal bank accounts of the prime minister.

Najib has vehemently denied this, but former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the opposition and civil society want his head to roll.

Malaysiakini asked two political analysts - Universiti Malaya's Department of International and Strategic Studies senior lecturer Khoo Ying Hooi (photo) and University of Tasmania's Asia Institute director James Chin - to gaze into their respective crystal balls over three questions.

1. Is Najib in a Catch-22 situation?

Khoo: A short answer, yes. 1MDB has not only caused an uproar among opposition parties and the public in general, but what is important to note is that it has also worsened the already shaking ruling coalition, BN.

Chin: Not really, all he has got to do is deny and as long as the Umno supreme council and Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin accept it, then he (Najib) is safe. The problem is that if he does deny it while the rumours are that the accounts were actually controlled by Rosmah Mansor. Only the DPM can force him to step down.

2. But he cannot step down as it would give the impression that he is guilty of all the allegations and it could ignite calls for a witch hunt against him and his family. Your opinions.

Khoo: By putting Malaysia in political uncertainty, what more with the Malaysian ringgit now hitting the lowest since 1999, the question of whether he is guilty or not is no longer the main concern as the damage has taken place. The unclear statements and information provided to the people on this issue have shaken public confidence to its lowest. The way it is now, it is possible that a public uproar might take place.

Chin (photo): He will never step down as Rosmah will not allow it. He will fight to the last man, so to speak.

3. By staying on, his credentials would continue to plunge and with it, the perception of BN as well. Is there no way out?

Khoo: Doesn't seem like it (a way out). In many countries, the exercise of leaders stepping down and apologising after a controversy is normal. You don't need to be guilty to resign, it is more of a ministerial responsibility.

But by staying on and coupled with ambiguous statements, moreover with many questions remaining unanswered (for example, the bank accounts), the prime minister is worsening the already damaged reputation and leadership. What's more, this affects the confidence of people in public institutions that could cause a lot more harm in the near future for the country.

Chin: There is a way out- an international authority. For example, if the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) or the international banks say there is no such transactions. Malaysians don't trust our MACC (Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission) or police.

So the clearance will have to come from international bodies. AmBank and Bank Negara can also come out to say these accounts do not exist. If these accounts can be proven to be directly controlled and used by Najib, he's toast.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/304371>