

Cover-up won't work, international watchdog tells Najib

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Koh Jun Lin

International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) council member Michael Hershman has urged Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to come clean on the RM2.6 billion donation that he received.

Hershman said the truth would eventually emerge and any attempt at a cover-up would not work. So, as such, it would be in Najib's and Malaysia's best interest to reveal what transpired, sooner rather than later.

“My advice to the Malaysian prime minister would be not to cover up, not to obstruct justice because it doesn't work.

“Tell the truth. Where did the money come from? What was its intended use and if he did something wrong, ask for forgiveness and face the consequences.

“It's not going to go away. Delay is not going to make this issue go away. The truth will come out and in my experience, the sooner it comes out, the better off it is for those who are accused and the country,” Hershman told reporters when met in Putrajaya today.

He said that as a former adviser to Najib (photo) and the government on anti-corruption matters, he had believed in Najib's commitment to integrity.

This was because Najib's policies helped turned the MACC into one of the largest and best-funded anti-corruption agencies in the world, as well as giving the commission much flexibility.

“And so I respected him and I believed in his integrity. To say that I am disappointed (with the donation scandal) is a bit of an understatement.

“I am still willing to believe in Najib, but he has got to tell the truth,” he added.

Hershman was a member of the International Performance Review Committee for the Government Transformation Programme in 2010.

However, he said, the committee has not met since 2013 nor has the Prime Minister's Department contacted him over the past few years.

Najib missed the opportunity to explain

The Transparency International co-founder also voiced disappointment over Najib's move not to officiate the IACC conference, lamenting that it is a missed opportunity.

"I had hoped that he would use this as a platform to explain what happened, to tell the truth.

"He missed that opportunity," he said.

Yesterday, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Paul Low (photo) said Najib was advised not to attend the conference due to the expected hostile reception he would receive.

Hershman also opined that the government is unlikely to achieve its goal of garnering a Corruption Perception Index (CPI) score of 70 (from the current 52) and become among the top 30 countries (from the current 50) by the year 2020 under the current situation.

He said in his experience, the CPI of a country tends to fall whenever it faces a major corruption scandal.

Nevertheless, Hershman believes that Malaysia's CPI score would rise again, once the current scandal has ended.

"I think the anti-corruption infrastructure is strong enough to be able to come back after this scandal is put behind, and achieve a much better score," he said.

He also stood by his statement in April where he said corruption in Malaysia is under control.

"I do believe that by and large, the anti-corruption infrastructure in the country has worked to lessen the level of corruption.

"One incident like the one that we are talking of now doesn't change my views, but even back then, as I have said, there is still a lot of work to do," Hershman added.