

MACC says faces no interference in PM probe

MalaysiaKini.com

Sept 4th, 2015

Astrid Zweynert, Thomson Reuters Foundation

Malaysia's Anti-Corruption Commission's investigation into allegations that millions of dollars ended up in Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's bank account has been free of government interference, its deputy commissioner said on Friday.

A media report in July said investigators looking into alleged mismanagement at debt-laden state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) traced a payment of almost US\$700 million to an account under Najib's name.

"The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) is investigating this issue without fear or favour - we always investigate independently," deputy chief commissioner Mustafar Ali told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in an interview.

Mustafar said it would be wrong to jump to the conclusion that the prime minister, who has denied any wrongdoing, was guilty of corruption without a thorough investigation.

"We have an investigation going on. One is innocent until proven guilty, so let the due process of law take place," he said on the sidelines of an international anti-corruption conference.

He added that some of the evidence in the case was still being collected and that the commission still had witnesses to interview.

The MACC said last month it would ask Najib to explain how millions of dollars were allegedly deposited into his private bank account.

Najib has denied any wrongdoing and says he did not take any money for personal gain but, nevertheless, faces the biggest crisis of his political career.

A rally last weekend drew tens of thousands of people to the streets of the capital Kuala Lumpur to call for his resignation.

Corruption crisis

Transparency International said on Wednesday that Malaysia is facing a "corruption crisis".

"We want to see more progress but that cannot happen while there are unanswered questions about the US\$700 million that made its way into the prime minister's personal bank account," Jose Ugaz, chair of the graft watchdog, said at the conference.

Mustafar denied that the allegations against the prime minister constituted a major corruption crisis.

"Corruption happens in Malaysia, not serious of course, but it does happen," he said. "But this is not a major crisis."

Critics of the MACC, which replaced the Anti-Corruption Agency in 2009, say the commission is not independent from the government as it is administered by the prime minister's department and should be answerable to parliament instead.

Mustafar said the fact the commission is monitored by five independent panels, including one made up of lawmakers from across the political spectrum, ensured its independence.

A 2013 UN review of Malaysia's anti-corruption efforts commended the country for its practices in fighting graft.

Corruption conviction rates rose to 78 percent in 2014 from 54 percent in 2009, according to the MACC.

Malaysia has also improved its ranking in Transparency International's index of perceived levels of public sector corruption in 175 countries, rising to 50th last year from 53rd in 2013.

The government has said its aim is to be in the top 30 countries in the index by 2020.

- Thomson Reuters Foundation

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
Source: <http://www.malysiakini.com/news/311163>