

Source claims RM2.6b from late king, but Saudi ministries clueless

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Saudi Arabia's finance and foreign affairs ministries are in the dark about the supposed donation from the Saudi royal family to Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

However, an unnamed source reportedly claimed that the money came from the late Saudi King Abdullah (photo), who reigned until he passed away last year.

According to The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) today, the two ministries have declined to comment on attorney-general Mohd Apandi Ali's statement yesterday, but said they have no information about such a donation, which would have been unprecedented.

"A Saudi government official, while declining to comment specifically on the prosecutor's statement, said the Saudi ministries of foreign affairs and finance had no information about such a gift and that a royal donation to the personal bank account of a foreign leader would be unprecedented.

"Representatives of the royal family couldn't be reached for comment," the WSJ report says.

A spokesperson for the Saudi government told the Sydney Morning Herald that the government is investigating the matter.

Separately, the BBC quoted an unnamed source claiming that the money came from Abdullah, to help Najib win the 2013 general election.

It said the source, who is reportedly well-placed and has requested anonymity, claimed that the money was drawn from Abdullah's personal finances, as well as state coffers.

"The purpose of the donation was simple, said the Saudi source - it was to help Mr Najib and his coalition win the election, employing a strategic communications team with international experience, focusing on the province of Sarawak, and funding social programmes through party campaigning.

"But why should the Saudis care about an election in a non-Arab country more than 6,000km (3,700 miles) away? The answer, the source said, lay in their concerns over the rising power of the Muslim Brotherhood, which they consider a terrorist organisation.

"The Saudis were already upset at events in Egypt, where President Mohammed Morsi was busy consolidating the Brotherhood's hold on the country," the report said.

The report explained that the opposition alliance at the time, Pakatan Rakyat, included PAS, whose founders were inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood.

It noted that this was despite there is little evidence that the brotherhood has much support in Malaysia.

'International investigators don't believe'

Yesterday, Apandi cleared Najib of corruption, basing his decision on the investigation by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC).

Among others, Apandi (photo) said Najib's RM2.6 billion donation in 2013 came from the Saudi royal family, and of this sum, RM2.03 billion was not used and had been returned.

The timing of the donation was just ahead of the 13th general election, and was during Abdullah's reign.

However, WSJ in its report said some international investigators do not believe this to be the case.

"The US Federal Bureau of Investigation and other government agencies from outside Malaysia continue to investigate the transfer.

"Some international investigators don't believe the nearly US\$700 million came from Saudi Arabia, according to a person familiar with the inquiries," the report says.

The report also quoted a former political analyst at the Saudi Embassy in Washington as saying that the idea that the Saudi royalty would donate the vast sum to a personal bank account, instead of a government institution, is "suspect".

"The notion that the Saudi 'royals' would 'donate' hundreds of millions of dollars to a foreign leader, as opposed to a government institution, struck me as suspect, to say the least," the analyst, Fahad Nazer, is reported as saying.

However, the BBC's Saudi source reportedly said there is nothing unusual about the donation.

He said Jordan, Morocco, Egypt and Sudan have all been multi-hundred-million dollar beneficiaries of Saudi royal funds.

"There is nothing unusual about this donation to Malaysia. It is very similar to how the Saudis operate in a number of countries," he was quoted as saying.