

Riza right behind PM, why don't cops quiz him, Zahid asked
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PARLIAMENT Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi today dodged queries about the police probe into the 1MDB scandal, and passed the buck to others.

Gobind Singh Deo (DAP-Puchong) had asked whether the police planned to grill Riza Aziz, the stepson of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, who had been accused by US authorities of using misappropriated 1MDB funds.

Nga Kor Ming (DAP-Taiping) also questioned whether the police had asked for Interpol's assistance to track down Riza's associate, Penang-born tycoon Jho Low, who is accused of having swindled 1MDB monies.

However, Zahid, who was wrapping up the Home Ministry's part in the Budget 2017 debate, did not respond to the questions.

"I don't have to touch on those questions in this (Budget 2017) wrap up," he said with a smile.

He added that when the time comes, maybe the minister in charge of law - who is Azalina Othman Said - would answer these queries.

Azalina however did not touch this topic in her budget wrap-up speech after Zahid.

Meanwhile, Zahid's response caused a minor stir when Nga and Gobind continued their line of questioning.

Gobind said it was "very embarrassing".

"The most important person (to question) is behind the prime minister, (but police are not) taking his statement," the DAP lawmaker said.

He was referring to Riza being spotted disembarking from the government's official jet together with Najib in China.

Riza and Low were named in the US Department of Justice's civil suits, which claimed that more than US\$3.5 billion of 1MDB funds had been swindled.

Among others, the DOJ claimed that Low had used 1MDB funds to purchase jets and other luxury goods, while Riza had allegedly used received misappropriated 1MDB funds as a 'gift'.

Earlier in the day, Zahid had also dodged other questions related to 1MDB from Gobind.

Gobind had asked whether a police probe into the alleged RM2.6 billion donation to Najib had been reopened, after revelations that it was not a donation.

This is in reference to allegations, including by the DOJ, that the money had not come from Saudi royalty as claimed, but had originated from 1MDB.

Gobind had also wanted to know if this was true, who actually received the US\$620 million Najib returned to the 'donor.'

"I think that question will be answered by the second finance minister (Johari Abdul Ghani)," Zahid told the House.

As to Gobind's request for Zahid to explain his previous statements that he had met the donor, the deputy premier replied: "I had a meeting with both sources, and they said as such."

He added that he had explained this to the task force probing 1MDB.

Pressed further, Zahid replied that such questions will be answered by the relevant ministry, and that it had "nothing to do" with the Home Ministry.

Earlier, N Surendran (PKR-Bagan Serai) had asked whether the government had any plans to stop the trend of police targeting opposition lawmakers for speaking out.

He said Malaysia was the second worst in the world in terms of probing opposition MPs for exercising their right to freedom of speech and assembly.

To this, Zahid replied: "Bagan Serai should meet with insurance companies to insure his mouth."

Surendran said the reply was uncalled for and demanded a retraction. However, no ruling was made and the issue was quickly overtaken by Gobind's 1MDB questions.

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