

Penang to probe PKR links to 'illegal' sand mining
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Questions of independence hangs over the Penang government's special taskforce set up to investigate the legal status of a sand mining company and its alleged 'illegal activities' in Batu Kawan.

The task force, which will also look into alleged PKR links to the scandal, not only comprises top party state leaders, but is helmed by the very figure implicated in the poison pen allegations.

Leading the taskforce is PKR state assemblypersons Law Choo Kiang (Bukit Tambun), Ong Chin Wen (Bukit Tengah) and Maktar Shapee (Sungai Bakap).

Law (right) is PKR state deputy chief, while Ong is the party's state deputy youth chief and Batu Kawan division youth chief, while Maktar is Nibong Tebal PKR branch chief.

Casting doubt is the fact that the Bukit Tambun assemblyperson himself is at the centre of the sand storm, although Law has called the allegations 'irresponsible and mala fide'.

Law, who is also state exco in charge of agriculture, rural development and flood mitigation, said the allegations, made in a vicious letter circulated through the internet, was the work of someone intent on smearing his image.

He declined to reveal the suspect behind the letter, nor would he comment about the allegations of top level corruption in the state government.

"Since this is a poison pen letter, it is an irresponsible act created by someone with the purpose of smearing another's image," he said.

"I strongly believed that it is a mala fide action with a hidden agenda," he added.

Plot thickens

Law, together with Deputy Chief Minister I Mansor Othman (left), has been accused of having a clandestine relationship with a mine owner purportedly carrying out illegal sand mining in Batu Kawan.

The poison pen letter accused the two of receiving kickbacks in terms of huge donations from the mine owner, directly into their bank accounts.

Prior to the letter's circulation, Seberang Perai Municipal councillor and PKR Batu Kawan exco member Goh Choon Aik had abruptly quit his party post.

He was reportedly unhappy that there was no investigation into the allegations of the same illegal sand mine.

Goh, who retained his councillor post, has been at loggerheads with Law for weeks, and their shenanigans were reported in the local Chinese dailies.

He has since been threatened with a lawsuit by the sand mine owner, allegedly an ex-Gerakan supporter who switched camps after the last general election.

The mine owner maintains that he has official state approval for his mining activities.

Goh tight-lipped

When contacted, Goh declined to comment and tried to play down the situation.

When asked if he was aware that he may be suspected as the 'someone' behind the letter, he said, "No, never, nobody suspects me."

About his resignation from his party post, Goh said, "everything is fine. I am still a member."

He was also tight-lipped about the investigation committee being headed by someone who has been accused of corruption.

"No comment...no comment. I will wait for the investigation results," he told Malaysiakini.

"I will only comment after the investigation results are out," he added.

Meanwhile, Law has also announced, "The taskforce has seven days to finish the probe and table the findings in the state exco meeting before we make it public."

"Whether the sand mining activity is legal or not, please wait for the final report after it is adopted by the state exco."

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