

Deputy internal security minister probed
Malaysiakini.com
March 4, 2007

Deputy Internal Security Minister Mohd Johari Baharum is being investigated for allegedly accepting more than RM5 million in bribes to free a number of detainees linked to organised crime.

This latest 'freedom for sale' scandal comes hot on the heels of graft allegations against the country's top corruption fighter - Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) director-general Zulkipli Mat Noor.

The 'freedom for sale' allegation against Johari first surfaced on the Internet - in a page hosted by free website, Freewebs.com. It accused him of being the "most powerful, but corrupted deputy minister."

The anonymous website cited three 'classic cases' in which Johari had allegedly abused his power and breached the trust of Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is his immediate boss in the Internal Security Ministry.

"His abuse of power must be seen to be interfering with police investigation and also jeopardising police efforts to maintain peace as well as law and order in the country," it said.

Three incidences alleged

In the first case, Johari was alleged to have ordered the release of a gang leader from Perak in January this year. The gang leader is said to be the younger brother of another deputy minister.

Last month, Johari also allegedly ordered the release of a suspect held in connection with illegal gaming and book-keeping in Sabah. The website claimed Johari was paid RM3 million for this.

In the third case, it was alleged that another gang leader from Perak had secured his freedom after he "settled with Johari for a sum not less than RM2.5 million."

The deputy minister has denied this. He reportedly described the allegations as "slanderous".

Under the EO, the minister has wide powers to order for suspects to be detained for two years without trial. The minister's decision cannot be challenged in court.

The EO has been used over the years to detain or restrict the movement of suspected gang members and criminals - most of whom the police find difficult to bring to justice due to lack of evidence.

Instead of arresting suspects and charging them for offences under the criminal law, the police detain them in Johor's Simpang Renggam camp.

While Abdullah helms the internal security ministry, it is widely known that much of the

work has been delegated to the deputy minister, especially given that the prime minister is also the finance minister.

Nobody is above the law

Meanwhile, the Star today reported that the ACA is investigating a 'senior politician' for allegedly accepting money to assist in freeing several suspects held under the draconian Emergency Ordinance, which allows detention without trial.

ACA director of investigations Mohd Shukri Abdul was quoted as saying that the agency has identified the politician and witnesses allegedly involved in the case.

The same report also quoted Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak as stressing that nobody was above the law and those who broke it would face action.

In a related development, Inspector-General of Police Musa Hassan told malaysiakini that the police is assisting the ACA in its investigation.

Calling for a fair probe, he said the matter also involved the integrity of the police force.

"If any police personnel are found to be involved, action will be taken against them," he added when contacted this afternoon.

However, he was not unwilling to confirm whether the three detainees were indeed freed.

Johari, 53, served as political secretary to Abdullah when he was home minister in 1999.

A year later, he was appointed political secretary for then prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

When Mahathir step down in 2003, Johari rejoined Abdullah's staff, earning him the rare distinction of having served as political secretary to two prime ministers.

He subsequently contested and won Kedah's Kubang Pasu - a parliamentary seat which was held by Mahathir for over three decades.

In February 2006, Johari was tapped by Abdullah as his deputy in the Internal Security Ministry in a minor cabinet reshuffle.

He is widely considered to be close to the prime minister, especially after Johari - who is also Umno Kubang Pasu division chief - played a key role in preventing his ex-boss, Mahathir, from being elected as the division's delegate to the party's assembly last year.

Probe on ACA boss

Last week, the nation was shocked to learn of the accusations against the ACA director-general.

Zulkipli, a former high-ranking police officer, was accused of corruption and abuse of power. He was said to have amassed properties and wealth beyond his means.

Apart from this, it was also revealed that a businesswoman had accused him of a sexual crime and assault in 1997 when he was Johor police.

However, attorney-general Abdul Gani Patail said police investigations back then found no grounds for prosecution.

The allegations against Zulkipli were contained in a report penned by former Sabah ACA chief Mohamad Ramli Manan to former inspector-general of police Mohd Bakri Omar last year.

The report, exposed by an anti-corruption watchdog, was also sent to the prime minister, attorney-general, auditor-general and civil service director-general.

Zulkipli has since denied the allegations.

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