

PM: No action against Johari for now
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Beh Lih Yi

Deputy Internal Security Minister Mohd Johari Baharum will remain in office pending completion of a corruption probe against him, Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

"We do not necessarily have to ask him to resign," he told reporters when asked to comment on whether Johari should be suspended or if he should take leave.

Reporters questioned Abdullah after he emerged from a four-hour meeting with the Bank Negara board of directors at the central bank building in Kuala Lumpur today.

He dismissed a suggestion that there could be interference in the investigations should his deputy in the Internal Security Ministry - whose portfolio includes overseeing the police force - remain on duty while the probe is underway.

"There won't be any interference. Furthermore, the IGP (inspector-general of police Musa Hassan) has said the case has been fully handed over to the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA)," said Abdullah, who is also the internal security minister.

He noted that there is no proof as yet that Johari is guilty - action will be taken, however, should any evidence come to light.

High-profile cases

Abdullah did not directly respond to whether the two recent high-profile corruption probes against Johari and ACA director-general Zulkipli Mat Noor (photo) have come as a blow to his campaign against corruption. He made a pledge in 2003 to clean out corruption.

He said such incidents reveal that everyone is wary about corruption cases, but that action would be taken against those who are corrupt.

Pressure has been mounting on him to suspend the duo, following separate allegations of graft against them over the last two weeks.

Johari was alleged to have released three criminal suspects held under the Emergency Ordinance after receiving bribes amounting to RM5.5 million. The accusation surfaced on a free webhost, Freewebs.com.

He has denied the allegations and instead accused the police of inaction and not following the 'standard operating procedure' in investigations, which led to detainees having to be freed.

The police are now conducting an internal investigation to ascertain whether there has been a breach of procedure, as he has claimed.

Several serious graft allegations were levelled earlier against the ACA chief, who has denied that he has accumulated properties and wealth beyond his means.

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