

Let a royal commission clear Najib first
Malaysiakini.com
Mar 30, 09
Kim Quek

In a heated press conference at the end of the Umno annual assembly on March 28, the newly-crowned Umno president Najib Abdul Razak failed to dispel swirling rumours of his alleged links to the murder of Mongolian national Altantuya Shaariibuu.

This press conference had attracted unusual foreign press attention, due to heightened international media coverage over the scandal as Najib's anticipated ascension to premiership nears.

And as the name of Altantuya splashes in news features that pop up all over the world from France to Australia and from US to India, Najib seems to be irretrievably linked to this murder scandal.

Answering a barrage of questions from foreign journalists whether these persistent aspersions would undermine his premiership, Najib said: "These are malicious and baseless lies. I have already given my answers, but they persist. This is an opposition ploy."

Najib sounded as if he had already given all the necessary explanations to exonerate himself from his apparently strong connection to the case, but all he had done was the repeated uttering of these few words: "I had never met the Mongolian woman."

In fact, he has sworn in public several times, using these same words.

A few unanswered questions

If Najib thought those words were sufficient to quell the mountain of suspicion arising from the myriad of burning questions as yet unanswered in the face of dubious action or inaction by the law enforcers.

Just to pick a few of these to demonstrate how serious these questions are:

* Private investigator P Balasubramaniam and his entire family mysteriously disappeared a day after he revealed a sworn statement giving intimate details incriminating Najib to the murder case in July 2008. Despite promises to investigate, the police have remained silent over the contents of this affidavit. And the court had also barred the admission of this document. Why did the police and the court keep a safe distance from this document that could have led to a breakthrough of this trial? What has happened to Balasubramaniam and family – as nobody seems to know their whereabouts?

* Why further evidence by Altantuya's cousin Burmaa Oyunchinmeg when she testified that Najib appeared in a photograph with Altantuya blocked?

* Why did the court block further evidence upon revelation in court that Malaysian immigration records of Altantuya and her two Mongolian companions had been mysteriously erased? Shouldn't such erasure have been considered an important lead and an indication that some VVIP was involved?

* Why were Najib and his aide-de-camp Musa Safri not investigated and called to the witness stand, since it was Musa who gave instructions to the first accused (first and second accused were Najib's bodyguards) to solve third accused Abdul Razak Baginda's 'woman problem'.

Now that Razak Baginda (a close associate of Najib) has been declared innocent, we are now left with the bizarre scenario of a murder without a motive, since the first two accused had no motive on their own to kill the victim.

During the press conference, not satisfied with Najib's answer, journalists repeatedly asked the same questions. Finally, Najib snapped: "We will deal with it."

When asked whether this means possible crackdowns against his political opponents, Najib protested: "It is not fair to prejudge me. Give me a chance to take office first. Judge me by my action."

So, Najib is pleading to be allowed to become the prime minister first, then judge him for what he does.

But is it fair to ask the nation to accept the risk of appointing a prime minister when such formidable dark clouds clearly hang over his head? If there is indeed incriminating evidence, would it not act as a potential time bomb that could cause the PM to be prosecuted or subject to blackmail by those in possession of such evidence?

Even if such evidence is non-existent, Najib has no way of running away from this taint, which would surely undermine his standing and effectiveness as PM at home and abroad, so long as he refuses to submit himself to a proper investigation and subsequent vindication in a court of law.

Independent inquiry necessary

It is therefore imperative that a royal commission be set up to clear Najib of such suspicion before his appointment as PM to safeguard vital national interests. That would mean a delay of a few months to his impending appointment.

I can see no possible reason to object to such delay as incumbent prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, whose term does not end until 2013, is fully capable of helming the state, fresh from accolades heaped upon him by his party for rendering invaluable service to the nation.

Najib in particular should welcome such an authoritative process to free him from the current tag and enhance his credibility as future premier and he should therefore have no objection to such delay. Unless of course, for reasons only known to him, he cannot afford to be so probed, neither could he afford not to be at the pinnacle of power at this very moment.

As for the nation at large, such an independent inquiry should bring a sigh of relief that the future premier is cleared of at least the taint of Altantuya.