

## **No Ring But What About The Birkin Handbags?**

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**By Teo Nie Ching**

As the General Elections looms, UMNO is pulling out all the stops in its efforts to reclaim the state. Most recently, the UMNO propaganda machinery has launched an all-out charm offensive including a comic strip titled "Who's Rosmah?" in a desperate attempt to portray her as a cost-conscious and kind-hearted "First Lady".

No matter how much glorious praise is lavished on the Prime Minister's wife by the UMNO propaganda department, it is unlikely that the term "cost-conscious" could be applied to her!

During the current Parliament sitting, I had put forward a question requesting confirmation whether there is any truth in the persistent rumor that Rosmah owns a diamond ring worth USD24 million and a large number of Birkin handbags.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nazri Aziz in his written reply dated 11th October curtly confirmed that the rumour about Rosmah owning a USD24 million diamond ring is not true.

However, Nazri evaded answering the other part of the question pertaining to the Birkin handbags.

Indeed, the Royal Custom and Excise Department of Malaysia had confirmed that there was no transaction pertaining to the diamond ring as the ring had been returned to the U.S. company that owns it.

Now, if Nazri so obviously chose not to clarify the Birkin handbag question, does this mean that this particular rumour is true?

It is a known fact that Rosmah has appeared in public countless times clutching her Birkin handbags.

Going by the photos compiled by netizens, the number of Birkin handbags carried by her in official functions as well as when she is on holiday adds up to not just one or two but at least 11 in different colours!

Manufactured by Hermès since 1984 and named after the British actress/singer Jane Birkin who resides in France, a Birkin handbag is a universally recognized as a symbol of extravagance and wealth. Due to its limited quantities therefore causing a huge demand, the price of a Birkin handbag ranges from USD9,000 to USD150,000.

Let us analyze the situation further. Najib started his political career at the age of 23 by inheriting, without a fight, the parliamentary seat held by his father, Tun Abdul Razak who was the second Prime Minister of Malaysia. In his smooth-sailing political career, he was appointed as a Deputy Minister by the age of 25, and then Menteri Besar of Pahang at the age of 29. He returned to Parliament when he was 33 and was appointed as Culture, Youth and Sports Minister. He then held various ministerial positions such as Minister of Defence (1991), Minister of Education (1995), Deputy Prime Minister (2004) and DPM-cum-Minister of Finance (Sept 2008). Although the salary of a Prime Minister or a Minister is quite considerable, surely the salary isn't so high that one can easily afford such excessive extravagance such as the items being flaunted by Rosmah?

If UMNO is fanatically pitching Rosmah as a "First Lady" of great prudence and passion for charitable work, it would bode well for its propaganda department to address the public's curiosity and valid questions regarding the Birkin handbags that accompany Rosmah wherever she goes - whether she bought them with her own money, or they were given to her as gifts, or they are in fact just imitations bought from Petaling Street vendors.

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