

'Dr M told me to resign'

Salleh reveals 5 incidents to push for review

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Salleh Abas yesterday revealed five incidents which he said proved that his fate as the Lord President was sealed before a tribunal heard misconduct charges against him in 1988.

He hoped that these incidents would meet the "new and important facts" criteria set by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz for a review of the 1998 judicial crisis.

"These new facts, I hope, could persuade Datuk Seri Nazri to change his mind. The incidents undeniably go to show that come what may, I must be made to give up my judicial office.

"There would, of course, be other incidents and other details which would emerge if the review is held but for the time being, I shall keep the identities of those unnamed persons concealed," said Salleh yesterday.

The five incidents which Salleh said would shed light on his sacking and the dismissal of Datuk George Seah and Datuk Wan Sulaiman Pawanteh are:

INCIDENT NO 1

The first incident relates to my meeting with the then

prime minister in his office on May 27 in the presence of the then deputy prime minister and chief secretary to the government.

"I was asked by the then prime minister to step down because I was accused of being biased in the discharge of my judicial duties.

"My understanding of this accusation was that it must have been connected with the impending Umno 11 (the case involving 11 Umno members who sought to nullify the 1987 party elections) case when I decided to establish a nine-member panel of the Supreme Court to hear the appeal.

"I strongly denied the accusation and told him that I was not prepared to resign. Then he threatened to dismiss me by instituting a tribunal under the Constitution. I told him I was prepared to be dismissed rather than leave the judicial office under a cloud."

INCIDENT NO 2

On May 27 1988, a messenger who was "a very important officer of the government" visited Salleh and tried to persuade him to resign or go on long leave. He rounded up by threatening Salleh with dismissal if he refused.

"Were I to resign, I would be appointed to a lucrative job in

Jeddah as a director of an Islamic bank with a high salary, coupled with an unlimited amount of entertainment allowance and travelling expense.

"The officer said he had been authorised to pass this message to me by a very important minister. I was threatened with dismissal and the ignominy of facing a tribunal. I gave the same answer I gave the prime minister earlier."

INCIDENT NO 3

A month after his suspension, Salleh said he was summoned by some Malay rulers to Istana Kelantan in Jalan Kia Peng.

"I was told by the then Raja of Perlis that should I tender my apologies to and ask forgiveness from the Yang di-Pertuan Agong for writing my letter to his Majesty, my suspension would be lifted and the matter would end there. I was to travel to Istana Bukit Serene with my chief counsel."

But Salleh alleged that the mission failed as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong had been "briefed by two senior government officers from Kuala Lumpur" not to forgive him.

INCIDENT NO 4

Salleh said his colleagues were suspended to thwart them from hearing a judicial review application challenging the legality and constitutionality of his suspension and the composition of the tribunal to deal with his dismissal.

INCIDENT NO 5

Salleh said that he and the late Tun Suffian Hashim acted as advisers to the Rulers when the government wanted to curb their immunity.

By then, the Sultan of Johor was no longer the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

"This was my first audience with the Sultan after my dismissal and he said to me in no uncertain terms that he very much regretted what had happened to me ... He said he then realised he had been 'made use of'."

Salleh said he told the Sultan not to feel sorry for him but "he should express his regrets and apology to the people of this country for losing a judiciary that was independent and could look after their rights."

"For these reasons, I hope Datuk Seri Nazri will present the proposal to the Cabinet for a review of the 1988 judicial crisis so that the truth of this important episode in our nation's history is uncovered."