

PM, wife sent lawyer on 'sensitive legal assignment' abroad, PKR MP reveals
The Malaysian Insider
April 17, 2012
By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, April 17 — A PKR lawmaker exposed in Parliament today a letter allegedly penned by prominent lawyer Datuk Seri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah (picture) claiming that he has been sent by the Prime Minister and his wife on a "sensitive legal assignment" abroad that "must be completed before the general election".

The letter, according to Saifuddin Nasution (PKR-Machang), was addressed to Chief Justice Tan Sri Ariffin Zakaria, Court of Appeal president Tan Sri Md Raus Sharif Chief Judge Malaya Tan Sri Zulkefli Ahmad Makinudin on March 23, and seeks for a postponement of Shafee's cases from April 2 to 25.

The lawmaker, who exposed the matter when debating amendments to the Penal Code, read several paragraphs of the letter in his possession.

"We write to Yang Amat Arif on the above matter as we seek to appraise Your Lordships of a specific development whereby Datuk Seri Dr Muhammad Shafee Abdullah has been appointed on behalf of the government of Malaysia, in particular by Yang Amat Berhormat Datuk Seri Mohd Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak and Datin Paduka Sri Rosmah Mansor, to undertake a sensitive legal assignment overseas that must be completed before the general elections (which is rumoured to be very soon)," he read.

"The nature of this legal assignment is confidential, at present. But, if required, Datuk Seri Dr Muhammad Shafee Abdullah can be present personally to see Yang Amat Arif-Yang Amat Arif for an explanation of the nature of this legal assignment," he added.

According to Saifuddin, the letter also states that as a result of the "assignment", Shafee would have to travel to several cities abroad including New York, London, Dubai, Paris and Basel.

He did not, however, read the letter in full or reveal the purpose of Shafee's alleged "sensitive legal assignment".

Saifuddin connected the matter earlier to the ongoing debates on amendments to the Penal Code by asking if possession of such a document would be considered as detrimental to "parliamentary democracy", a point in the proposed Bill that lawmakers have been locked in debates all afternoon over.

"Would the person in possession of such a document be charged under provisions of it being detrimental to parliamentary democracy?" he asked the House.

Interjecting, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz said he would not be able to comment on the issue as he was unsure of the letter's authenticity.

Deputy Speaker Datuk Ronald Kiandee, who was presiding over policy stage debates at the point, then warned Saifuddin to verify the documents in his possession.

"I have done my homework. I am confident of the authenticity of the documents," Saifuddin said in response.

When winding up debates on the Bill later, Nazri told the House that the government had not appointed Shafee for the alleged mission abroad, pointing out that the purported letter had mentioned Rosmah's name.

"This is not a government appointment because the government cannot appoint a lawyer to represent the prime minister's wife," he said.

When asked by R. Sivarasa (PKR-Subang) whether Shafee had then committed an offence by claiming his appointment was by the government, Nazri noted that the latter may have committed "misrepresentation".

"But it is not against the Constitution and has nothing to do with this Act," he said.

He also said it was likely that the matter was merely the personal actions of the prime minister's private lawyer.

Recent media reports have pinned Najib to the ongoing Scorpene submarine sale probe by French authorities, which has also been linked to the case of murdered Mongolian model Altantuya Shaariibuu.

Altantuya's one-time lover Abdul Razak Baginda, who was said to be a close associate of Najib, was acquitted of a charge of abetting two Special Action Squad members – Azilah Hadri and Sirul Azhar Umar – to commit the murder in 2006.

The murder was committed between 10pm on October 19, 2006, and 1am the following day at a clearing in Shah Alam's Mukim Bukit Raja.

Last week, Altantuya's father Dr Setev Shaariibuu told a press conference in Petaling Jaya that he had offered himself as a witness in the Scorpene submarine probe, claiming that his testimony would be able to "connect the dots" between her death and the Scorpene" case, which will be heard in a French court soon.

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