

Najib dismisses claims RM40m Sabah Umno cash was smuggled
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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 19 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak brushed aside today suggestions that a RM40 million political donation received by Sabah Umno had been smuggled into the country.

The Umno president was asked today by reporters if there was any basis to the suggestion by Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leaders that the money was brought in illicitly.

"No. No. It was already explained in Parliament," he said when asked about the smuggling allegations.

Yesterday, the Barisan Nasional (BN) government continued to defend Sabah Umno's RM40 million political contribution from an unknown source, with an Umno minister telling opposition lawmakers to refer to Hong Kong's anti-graft agency if they opposed the contribution.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz, in deflecting criticisms against Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman in the Dewan Rakyat, told the House that it was not an offence for a political party to receive donations from any individual.

"Political donations are not any offence. If we wanted to say it is an offence, we would have enacted laws against it," he said to uproar from the opposition bench.

"If people want to contribute, let them contribute. What is the problem there?"

Last week, Parliament was told the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) had cleared Musa of graft and money-laundering allegations after finding that the over S\$16 million (RM40 million) allegedly channelled to the Sabah chief minister through corrupt means was meant for Sabah Umno's use.

Nazri also said the Attorney-General's Chambers had shelved the matter after finding no element of corruption in the case, which was first raised by whistleblower site Sarawak Report earlier this year.

In April this year, Sarawak Report had revealed documents allegedly from the Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) showing that a Sabah lawyer was holding some US\$30 million in a Swiss bank account for Musa.

The report also claimed that a paper trail showed that the millions of euros as well as US, Hong Kong and Singapore dollars had been channelled from several firms managed by Hong Kong-based timber trader Michael Chia to a number of British Virgin Islands companies and subsequently to the Chia's Swiss account.

Musa has since denied any link with Chia, who was arrested and charged with money laundering after attempting to smuggle S\$16 million (RM40 million) back to Malaysia in 2008.

According to media reports, Chia had at the time allegedly told the Hong Kong authorities that the money belonged to Musa.

Musa had previously accused Sarawak Report of defaming him, claiming the graft allegations were likely part of a conspiracy by his detractors who wanted to topple BN in the east Malaysian state.

He had said he would offer full co-operation to the authorities if he were required to but stressed that in the meantime, his focus was on serving the state instead of "entertaining these frivolous allegations".

Transparency International Malaysia (TI-M) said today it was appalled with the government's conclusion that "no element of corruption was proven" in its investigation of Musa.

The anti-graft watchdog urged the authorities today to ensure a full disclosure of the political contribution.

Last week, Najib also refused to disclose the source of the political donation received by Sabah Umno.

"It is a political donation. All parties have a right to receive political donations. As long as it is through the right channels, it is not an offence," the Umno president had told reporters after chairing a BN supreme council meeting.

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