

Have Najib's media advisers lost the plot, asks veteran newsman
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Veteran journalist Datuk A. Kadir Jasin has questioned the wisdom of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's media advisers and strategists in bringing up the PM's grandfather's role in financing his education, as controversy rages over Putrajaya's explanation on his family's inheritance following a media expose on the wealth of his step-son and lavish spending by his wife.

Kadir was referring to Najib's response published yesterday in pro-government Malay newspapers, Utusan Malaysia and Berita Harian, where the prime minister backed an earlier statement by his four younger brothers who took issue with speculation and aspersions cast on their father, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, over his inheritance.

Najib had backed the statement that Razak was a man known for his frugality and integrity, and had added that his father, who was Malaysia's second prime minister "was never involved in corruption or wrongdoing".

Najib had also put on record that his maternal grandfather, Tan Sri Mohamed Noah Omar, had funded his education, as proof of Razak's frugality, according to Utusan.

"Was it necessary for Najib and the mainstream media that support him to raise the matter of Mohamed Noah sponsoring the education of his grandchildren," Kadir wrote in his blog today.

The veteran editor said this was problematic because Noah, while highly regarded in the political world as one of Umno's founding members and Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat, had also gone on to establish a casino.

"Where and what is the role of Najib's numerous advisers on media, communications, psychological warfare and on his image?

"Is this a case of those we had hoped would help us and who would protect our image, has now brought us down, or worse, is it a sign that the prime minister is losing the plot?" Kadir said.

Noah, who died in 1990, and the late tycoon Tan Sri Lim Goh Tong had together founded Malaysia's first casino, in Genting Highlands in 1965, Kadir noted.

This was recorded in Lim's memoirs, "My Story", where the tycoon, who was nicknamed "Raja Judi" (Gambling King), recorded that he and Noah had set up a private company called Genting Highlands Sdn Bhd and had applied to the Pahang and Selangor governments for land.

Islam considers gambling a sin and Najib heads Umno, the lead Malay-Muslim party in the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition.

Kadir also noted that it took five days for Najib to comment on the statement issued by his brothers. The statement when it was issued on February 24 was not published by the mainstream newspapers.

In their statement, Najib's brothers – Datuk Johari, Datuk Nizam, Datuk Nazim, and Datuk Seri Nazir – dismissed talks of the extent of inheritance left by Razak.

"We wish to put on record that Tun Abdul Razak was a highly principled man, well-known to all who knew him for his frugality and utmost integrity and any statement or inference to the contrary would be totally false and misleading to his memory and to his service and sacrifices for the nation.

"We take issue with anyone who taints his memory, whatever the motive."

Their statement came about after The New York Times quoted a statement from the Prime Minister's Office that Najib's wealth came from a family inheritance in response to his stepson's purchase of opulent properties in New York City.

On February 8, The New York Times highlighted the wealth of businessman Low Taek Jho and his role as a property investor, whose transactions involved various parties including Riza Aziz, Najib's stepson.

The paper also reported that Najib had been tainted by news of his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor's spending on jewelry and designer handbags.

The issue of Najib's family inheritance arose when the paper, furnishing invoices and other documents as proof of jewellery purchases for Rosmah, had asked the Prime Minister's Office for a response.

The paper quoted the prime minister's office as saying: "Neither any money spent on travel, nor any jewellery purchases, nor the alleged contents of any safes are unusual for a person of the prime minister's position, responsibilities and legacy family assets." – March 3, 2015

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