

Sarawak Report editor calls order to examine 1MDB accounts a 'classic move'

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By Anisah Shukry

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's orders for the National Audit Department to examine 1Malaysia Development Berhad's (1MDB) accounts is a classic move by any politician to bury a controversial issue, Clare Rewcastle Brown said today.

The editor of whistleblower site Sarawak Report today urged the public to thwart such a move by maintaining pressure on the entire scandal.

"It seems to me that it's a classic move to kick this into the grass. An inquiry you can control and takes ages is a politician's fallback method when they have a really awkward scandal that they need to keep a lid on for as long as possible," Rewcastle Brown told the "1MDB: The Ultimate LOW Down" forum in Crystal Crown Hotel via online video-conference on Skype.

She predicted that the government would subsequently refuse to respond to any further questions raised on 1MDB until the audit was completed, while at the same time exerting influence onto the entire inquiry to ensure a favourable outcome.

"It's not just a Malaysian recourse, I can think of British examples where that happened. I think pressure should be kept up. Because people who have been acting the way they did should be exposed and appropriate people should resign."

Rewcastle Brown said there should be pressure on the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and the police to carry out vigorous investigations and interview all involved in the matter.

She also expressed hope that the Malaysian authorities looked into the "foreign facilitators" of the scandal, adding that a lot of professionals, such as bankers and accountants from abroad had facilitated the alleged corruption.

"The Malaysian public have a right to get an honest and professional investigation handled by authorities who are not swayed by the people in power to bend rules or worse," Rewcastle Brown said.

"I think there's evidence a number of people with high standing and profession have failed 1MDB's clients, which are Malaysians, who financed 1MDB."

Rewcastle Brown's Sarawak Report released a series of hard-hitting exposés in recent weeks on 1MDB, its 2009 joint venture with PetroSaudi International and its alleged links to Low.

Sarawak Report claimed that Low had used PetroSaudi as a front to siphon off

US\$700 million from 1MDB.

It also alleged that Low had engineered the joint-venture between both companies, which resulted in 1MDB repaying a loan to PetroSaudi. But the funds allegedly went to a company controlled by Low, called Good Star Limited.

Low, PetroSaudi and 1MDB have since publically denied they had committed any wrongdoing, while the Cabinet on March 4 cleared 1MDB, saying the allegations only concerned external parties and not the strategic investment vehicle.

However, after much pressure, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said that the Auditor-General will be directed to conduct an independent audit of 1MDB's accounts. The report will then be passed to the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee, the police and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission for any further action.

Najib has vowed action against any wrongdoing if found. – March 15, 2015

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