

**"I Have the Right to Defend My Dignity," Says Najib
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 13 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak stressed that he had the right to defend his dignity and reputation by taking legal action against those who slandered him.

He said as a Malaysian holding the position of prime minister, Finance minister, member of parliament and as a public figure, he had the right to do so under the law.

Najib in his counterclaim filed yesterday to the statement of defence by former MCA president Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik said there was no provision in law that deprived him of his right to sue the plaintiff.

On Oct 27 last year, Najib sued Dr Ling, alleging that the defendant had with malicious intent slandered him in a statement during a function at a university college here, which a news portal on Oct 3 last year uploaded through an article.

Dr Ling in his statement of defence filed on Dec 14 last year claimed among others that Najib did not have the legal standing to act against him as it would be frivolous, vexatious and an abuse of the court process.

Najib dismissed the defendant's claim that he did not have the locus standi to file the defamation suit in his personal capacity.

He said the defendant had uttered the slanderous words based on general speculation, hearsay reported by the press and hearsay by individuals.

"There is no provision that gives the defendant the immunity to also slander the plaintiff with 'defamatory words' even if the plaintiff was being made a victim of vigorous slander by other parties.

"It is denied that the plaintiff as implied by the defamatory words had inappropriately or wrongfully accepted money that belonged to other people other than his own into his personal account," he said.

In any case, said Najib, the defendant was not in a situation so dire as to prompt him to utter the alleged words without first referring to him about it.

"This shows that the defendant did not act bona fide or as an 'elder statesman'. Being a former MCA president who had served the longest, the defendant should not have uttered such defamatory words without referring and getting an explanation from the plaintiff," he said.

He said it was clear that Ling had acted mala fide to damage his image and reputation.

He added that the issue involving the RM2.6 billion donation was under investigation and he did not want to overtake other agencies that had been tasked to investigate the case but to let them carry out and complete the investigation.

The UMNO president also stressed that the sum was a personal donation and so any breach of the UMNO constitution or in the UMNO financial statements for 2013 and 2014 did not arise.

Whatever was used for the party, he said, was between the party and plaintiff and had nothing to do with the defendant; therefore Dr Ling did not have any legal basis to raise the issue or use it as one of his grounds for defence.

Najib said it was clear that Dr Ling's defence could not sustain as it was not a valid ground.

Najib denied that his reputation had been tarnished and he was belittled nationally and internationally as a result of his own actions; he alleged it was due to the defendant's slander of him.

He also stressed that it was the prerogative of the plaintiff to take legal action at any time against any party who slanders him.

"And taking action against WSJ, SR, other UMNO leaders who had slandered the plaintiff is not a prerequisite to initiate action against the defendant.

"As a matter of fact, the defendant had already, without getting the plaintiff's version hurled those defamatory words. The defendant must be unafraid to face the legal consequences, as the Malay saying goes, 'terlajak perahu boleh diundur, terlajak kata buruk padahnya'," he said.

On Monday, High Court judge Datuk John Louis O'hara proposed to the two sides to settle the case through mediation.

Najib's lawyer Datuk Mohd Hafarizam Harun told reporters that he needed to seek his client's instructions in regards to the mediation proposal.

He said he would ask Najib whether he would be able to be present during the mediation process.

"I have been instructed to find ways to see if we can resolve this (suit) before going to court. Whether he is coming for the mediation, I have to get his instructions," he said.

Meanwhile, Dr Ling's lawyer, Ranjit Singh said Dr Ling was happy to go for mediation "provided that the Prime Minister is present during the process".

"Mediation is between two parties; to settle the suit the parties need to talk," he said.

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