

DoJ suits distracting us from larger agenda, says Hisham

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Minister says we cannot stop US govt's action but we have faced similar lawsuits previously and overcome them.

KUALA LUMPUR: The latest lawsuit filed by the United States Department of Justice (DoJ) to recover billions of ringgit worth of assets it says were bought with funds misappropriated from 1MDB can distract the Malaysian government from its larger agenda, said Defence Minister Hishammuddin Hussein.

However, he said, nothing could be done to stop the DoJ's action, especially since similar lawsuits had been filed before this.

"Let them do what they are doing. Furthermore, this is not something new. They (DoJ) have done it before and we were able to answer and overcome them.

"Things like these distract us from our larger agenda," he told a media conference at Wisma Pertahanan here today.

However, he did not explain what he meant by "larger agenda".

In its latest court filings in California, the DoJ is seeking to recover US\$540 million (RM2.3 billion) in assets including art works, jewellery and film rights believed to have been paid for with funds siphoned from 1MDB.

The assets named in the applications included the film rights to two comedies, "Dumb and Dumber To" starring Jim Carrey and "Daddy's Home" with Will Ferrell. Both productions were allegedly financed with millions of dollars from the Malaysian investment fund.

According to a Bloomberg report, the court filings yesterday were the latest attempt by the US government to seize assets linked to 1MDB, bringing the total sought by the DoJ to US\$1.8 billion.

The DoJ charged that from 2009 through 2015, more than US\$4.5 billion (RM19 billion) belonging to 1MDB had been diverted by high-level officials of the fund and their associates.

Earlier filings named several people, including Malaysian financier Jho Low and Prime Minister Najib Razak's stepson Riza Aziz.

Low, Riza, Najib and 1MDB have consistently denied any wrongdoing.

Today, 1MDB again rejected the charges, saying they were not furnished with clear evidence.

This stand was echoed by Attorney-General Mohamed Apandi Ali and the Prime Minister's Office, which said the DoJ documents were a repetition of previous charges but without any proof.

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