

PM's aide questions motive in latest US suit over 1MDB
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It regrets that the DoJ has not sought the cooperation of the government and 1MDB, and suggests the allegations may be construed as interference in domestic affairs.

KUALA LUMPUR: The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) today suggested there is more than meets the eye in the US action to seize assets allegedly bought with money siphoned from 1Malaysia Development Bhd.

It further suggested that these allegations were aimed at smearing certain individuals and arose from inputs by political opponents.

It is concerned that the US Justice Department (DoJ) had not sought the cooperation of the Malaysian government or 1MDB in its investigations into transactions involving 1MDB.

In a press statement today, the prime minister's press secretary Tengku Sariffuddin Tengku Ahmad said: "We are also concerned by the unnecessary and gratuitous naming of certain matters and individuals that are only relevant to domestic political manipulation and interference. This suggests a motivation that goes beyond the objective of seizing assets."

He reiterated, however, that the Malaysian government would fully cooperate with any lawful investigation of Malaysian companies or citizens in accordance with international protocols.

He said the PMO took note of the fact that the DoJ had brought new civil lawsuits "against various assets".

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 that it says were purchased with funds misappropriated from 1MDB.

According to a Bloomberg report it is 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, Prime Minister Najib Razak's stepson Riza Aziz and one MO1 or Malaysian Official 1.

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

Sariffuddin said: "There have been numerous and extensive investigations by Malaysian authorities into 1MDB, including by independent and bi-partisan bodies such as the Public Accounts Committee, and no crime was found."

He said 1MDB was still the subject of an investigation by the Malaysia police.

"If there is evidence of wrongdoing, Malaysia will not hesitate to take action.

"Until then, unproven allegations should not be taken as facts. And we take note of DoJ's own press release, which states that "A civil forfeiture complaint is merely an allegation that money or property was involved in or represents the proceeds of a crime. These allegations are not proven until a court awards judgment in favour of the US".

Saying the judicial process was not served by headline seeking, Sariffuddin added that Malaysia was all for transparency and good governance.

"That includes ensuring that accusations have a basis in fact, rather than smears briefed by political opponents.

"We are confident that justice will take its course and Malaysia will continue to cooperate with all willing international agencies. As the prime minister has always maintained, if any wrongdoing is proven, the law will be enforced without exception."

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