

Umno veep dares 'irresponsible' DoJ to press charges

Malaysia Today

June 18, 2017

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Hishammuddin Hussein says anyone can be the mysterious MO1.

KUALA LUMPUR: An Umno leader has challenged the United States' Department of Justice (DoJ) to press charges against those it accused of being involved in the alleged embezzlement of 1MDB funds.

The party's vice-president, Hishammuddin Hussein, said this would be the right thing to do if the "irresponsible" DoJ actually had proof to back up its allegations.

He added that by charging these individuals, those accused would be able to defend themselves, and it would also set the record straight, finally, on who the mysterious Malaysian Official 1 (MO1) was.

"I want to advise the DoJ, if they have strong evidence, then charge these people.

"Don't just make statements after statements, without taking actual action.

"If the DoJ doesn't take action (against those it claimed had siphoned 1MDB funds), then its credibility will be questioned," Hishammuddin told a press conference at the Putra World Trade Centre here today.

The DoJ has filed two civil forfeiture suits against assets worth US\$1.8 billion (RM7.7 billion) that it claimed were paid for with funds allegedly embezzled from 1MDB, making it the largest action brought by the DoJ's Kleptocracy Asset Recovery Initiative.

The first suit was filed on July 21 last year, where the term "MO1" was mentioned 36 times.

MO1 was again mentioned in the second suit filed earlier this week, which stated, among other things, that Malaysian businessman Low Taek Jho (Jho Low) had purchased a 22-carat pink diamond necklace worth US\$27.3 million for the "wife of Malaysian Official No 1" (MO1), using the same source of funds.

The DoJ didn't specify who the MO1 was, but Umno minister Abdul Rahman Dahlan last year told British media network BBC that it was obvious MO1 was Najib.

To this, Hishammuddin said the DoJ had been irresponsible by giving room for speculations.

“These are all allegations. If they (the DoJ) have proof, then charge (those it named in its civil suits).

“(Because) for all we know, MO1 could be anyone. It could be Jo Ghani,” he said, referring to Second Finance Minister Johari Abdul Ghani, who was also present this afternoon.

“But until we know for a fact, until they are charged officially, everything said are speculations. So when you allow (people to speculate), I’m saying DoJ is not being responsible.”

He also said that some quarters were now taking advantage of the DoJ’s findings to spin them in a way that suited their personal interests.

“Who is this MO1? We don’t know. But people will spin it the way they want to spin it, for whatever reason.

“Sometimes it’s done because of political considerations, and that is very irresponsible of the DoJ.”

In its latest court filings in California, the DoJ is seeking to seize US\$540 million (RM2.3 billion) in assets including art works, jewellery, a yacht worth US\$165 million, and film rights to two comedies, “Dumb and Dumber To”, starring Jim Carrey, and “Daddy’s Home”, with Will Ferrell, all paid for with funds allegedly embezzled from 1MDB.

Last July’s civil forfeiture suit sought to recover all the assets, including but not limited to, the Park Lane hotel in New York, a luxury hotel in Beverly Hills, condominiums in New York, a private jet, expensive works of art, as well as the financing of Martin Scorsese’s movie “The Wolf of Wall Street”, which starred Leonardo DiCaprio.

The value of the assets sought by the DoJ now totals US\$1.8 billion (RM7.7 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.

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Source: <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2017/06/18/umno-veep-dares-irresponsible-doj-to-press-charges/>