

Bustari Yusof: The PM's right-hand man
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Sarawak businessman said to have heavy influence in Putrajaya and is one of Najib Razak's closest friends, sources tell Singapore daily.

PETALING JAYA: Not much is known about the man said to be Prime Minister Najib Razak's right-hand man. But now, details are slowly emerging on businessman Bustari Yusof, whose position in Najib's circle is purportedly unparalleled.

According to The Straits Times, Bustari, who serves as the prime minister's senior political counsel, chief troubleshooter and economic adviser, is "easily" one of Najib's "closest friends".

Bustari first met Najib in the 1980s through the prime minister's wife, Rosmah Mansor. At the time, the two were colleagues at property development firm Island & Peninsular.

In 1987, the Sarawak businessman threw his weight behind then-chief minister Taib Mahmud, sealing his path to success when Taib emerged victorious in the struggle for the state's leadership.

According to the report which quoted several politicians, Bustari maintained close ties with Najib and began venturing into national politics after 2009, when Najib became prime minister.

The report added that Najib often benefited from Bustari's strong political connections in Sarawak, which is crucial in maintaining Barisan Nasional's (BN) grip on power in the country.

"He is the only person who straddles both business and politics within the inner circle, and what he says matters very much to the PM," a Kuala Lumpur-based businessman close to the political elite told the Singapore daily.

Another source, a chief executive of a government-controlled commercial bank, told ST that Bustari regularly plays golf with Najib and often goes on holiday trips with the prime minister's family.

But it's not all leisure and fun for Najib's "top go-to man". ST quoted sources who said Bustari is the person the prime minister sends when he wants to get a message across.

Referring to the government's decision last month to cancel Iskandar Waterfront Holdings' (IWH) contract to develop the Bandar Malaysia project, a close associate of

Najib said Bustari had been dispatched to “advise” IWH director Lim Kang Hoo, who had attempted to negotiate a U-turn in the issue.

“The fact that the message was delivered by Bustari showed that the PM was very serious about the warning that Lim would be blackballed if he did not stand down,” the source was quoted as saying.

Bustari, who has interests in the construction, healthcare, and oil and gas exploration sectors, is group chairman of investment holding company OBYU Holdings Sdn Bhd. The outfit is involved in property, construction, plantations and telecommunications.

In 2009, he bought a 30% stake in Petra Energy Bhd. At the time, he was also reported as holding a 27.5% interest in the company via Shorefield Resources Sdn Bhd.

Bustari’s Metrocare Services Sdn Bhd has a 60% stake in One Medicare Sdn Bhd, which has the concession to operate and manage hospital support services in Sarawak for a 10-year period.

According to ST, Bustari’s corporate interests are also expected to play a role in the RM27 billion Pan Borneo Highway, which is slated for completion by late 2021.

The report quoted executives in the construction industry who said one way to land a contract for the 1,089km-long highway was to forge ties with parties linked to Bustari.

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