

The Star October 2017

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1. MACC: Over RM300mil seized, 405 cases prosecuted since August 2016



PUTRAJAYA: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has taken 405 graft cases to court and seized cash and assets amounting to RM334.53mil since August 2016, says Tan Sri Dzulkefli Ahmad

The MACC chief commissioner also said they had opened 952 investigation papers over the same period.

He was speaking at the opening of the MACC's new complex here on Sunday.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who was speaking at the same event, assured that the MACC's fight against graft will continue to receive the backing and support from the Government.

He said corruption and power abuse was a threat to the nation and also to the people and the future of Malaysia.

"If we are able to fight this, Malaysia will be a successful country that is respected, progressive and competitive. We will be able to achieve our aspirations and goals if we are corruption-free.

"Rest assured that the Government will support the MACC's continuous effort to fight corruption and power abuse," he added.

Najib said his administration, under the Government Transformation Programme, had put in place initiatives to improve transparency.

This includes the setting-up of monitoring units at critical enforcement agencies and that any application for government procurement can be submitted online.

2. Two more arrested in Sabah rural project graft probe

KOTA KINABALU: Two more people were arrested Thursday as part of investigations into allegations that millions of ringgit were siphoned from rural development projects.

They were a 40-year-old assistant secretary in the infrastructure division at the Rural and Regional Development Ministry and a 50-year-old contractor.

The assistant secretary was detained at 8.15pm after she gave her statement at the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission office here. The contractor was detained half an hour later after he had also given his statement to the MACC.

The two arrests came after Parti Warisan Sabah vice-president Peter Anthony was detained by the graft busters at about 6.40pm.

It is learnt that Anthony, who is a founding member of Warisan led by former Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal, would be remanded with the others on Friday.

3. Pol-sec in RM40mil fund probe out on MACC bail

PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Peter Runin, the political secretary to the Human Resources Minister, was released after eight days in remand by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC).

Magistrate Ainna Sherina Saipolamin allowed the 61-year-old to be released with a MACC bail of RM30,000.

Runin is the fifth person arrested by the MACC to assist in the investigations involving the misappropriation of funds allocated to the Skills Development Fund Corporation.

His remand order was supposed to end on Oct 7 but the investigations on him have been completed.

He was arrested at the MACC headquarters where he gave his statement at 12.30pm on Sept 27.

On Sept 13, the MACC detained four individuals for allegedly misappropriating government funds worth almost RM40mil meant for training programmes.

Those arrested were a 58-year-old chief executive with a 'Datuk' title, a 34-year-old corporate secretary, a 32-year-old assistant finance officer, and a 38-year-old company director.

They were remanded on Sept 14 and have been released on MACC bail. -

4. MACC seizes another RM29mil in ministry theft probe

KUALA LUMPUR: Graft-busters have seized another RM29mil in its probe into the alleged embezzlement of a ministry's funds for rural projects.

Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) chief commissioner Tan Sri Dzulkifli Ahmad said this was following the seizure of more than RM150mil in a "recent Sabah case".

He said this in his speech during the 9th International Conference on Financial Crime and Terrorism Financing here Thursday morning.

More than RM150mil in cash were seized on Wednesday when investigators swooped in on 15 locations in Sabah during an operation.

It is understood that the case involves the Rural and Regional Development Ministry.

According to reports, funds to carry out projects meant to help the rural community were siphoned off by certain officials believed to be working in cahoots with several companies.

These projects included those to improve basic amenities and infrastructure, such as the upgrading of water and electricity supplies, as well as the repair and maintenance of roads in areas where the hardcore poor lived.

The culprits are believed to have pocketed more than RM100mil.

It is learnt that the thefts, which occurred over several years, had gone undetected.

5. MACC nabs 2 council workers, 3 contractors over alleged graft

PETALING JAYA: Two Ampang Jaya Municipal Council assistant engineers and three contractors have been rounded up by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) over suspected corruption involving several projects worth nearly RM80,000.

Sources said the two officers, aged 34 and 35, are with the council's engineering department and were arrested in Klang at about 3pm Friday in a sting operation.

The three contractors, two aged 32 and another aged 43, were picked up in their respective homes and offices by separate raiding teams.

"Among the items seized were designer handbags from Prada, Coach, Channel, Burberry, Louis Vuitton, Kate Spade and Micheal Kors.

"Cash amounting to RM57,000 was also confiscated from the house of a suspect," said a source.

Selangor MACC director Datuk Wan Ramli Wan Abdullah confirmed the arrests and seizures.

He said all five suspects would be held overnight and brought to the Klang magistrate's court for remand.

Initial investigations showed the suspects had collaborated and collected payment for projects which were not carried out in several locations around Ampang.

Among the projects was one related to the maintenance and installation of streetlights.

"We believe two suspects misused their power by issuing work completion certificates for the projects.

"One of them, valued at about RM19,500, was said to have been completed last February but checks showed that nothing was done," said a source, adding that they had already been paid.

The money trail showed funds were channelled to several bank accounts related to one of the suspects.

Three other incomplete projects between June and November last year valued at RM58,800, for which payment had been made, were also detected by the MACC.

6. Warisan veep Peter Anthony remanded five days in graft probe

KOTA KINABALU: Parti Warisan Sabah vice-president Datuk Peter Anthony and a businessman have been remanded for five days in a graft probe into the alleged siphoning of funds meant for rural projects in Sabah.

Magistrate Stephanie Sherron Abbie allowed for the two to be remanded for five days until Tuesday.

Anthony, 46, and the 52-year-old businessman were among three people nabbed by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission on Thursday in its probe into the alleged fraud.

Another person - a 40-year-old former deputy under secretary (infrastructure) from the Rural and Regional Development Ministry - was also nabbed in Putrajaya over the case.

She was remanded for six days until Oct 11.

7. MACC: RM1.5bil siphoned from federal rural project funds in Sabah



KOTA KINABALU: Graft busters are investigating how RM1.5bil was siphoned from a total of RM7.5bil funds allocated for rural projects in Sabah over the past six years.

Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) deputy chief commissioner (operations) Datuk Azam Baki (*pic*) said they were investigating some 60 companies that were awarded projects for the supply of water, electricity and roads to help people in rural Sabah.

"We are not targeting any specific personalities but will call up anyone whom we believe is connected to the projects," he told reporters at the MACC office here on Friday.

He said the investigations involved projects which were not completed or done in accordance with specifications.

Azam said the commission suspected that contractors gave bribes to certain people to secure the projects.

Under the procedures in awarding Federal-funded projects, Azam said that the relevant authority would appoint its own contractors and follow its own procedures.

He said that MACC's investigations into rural project funds began after it received information from whistleblowers, similar to last year's "Sabah Watergate" scandal.

In the Watergate scandal, three people were accused of laundering RM61.48mil and owning luxury goods from their illegal activities.

8. Shafie: I'm ready to meet MACC

KOTA KINABALU: Parti Warisan Sabah president Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal claims the probe into the siphoning of rural project funds is politically motivated, but that he is ready to meet graft busters.

"I can help in the investigations and tell them what they want to know but don't fabricate anything.

"I'm seeing allegations that those companies are Shafie's proxies. Please don't tell people that all the companies and money belong to me," he told reporters on arrival at the Kota Kinabalu International Airport here on Friday.

Shafie's key ally, Warisan vice-president Datuk Peter Anthony, and two others were arrested on Thursday by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) for investigations into the siphoning of more than RM100mil from rural project funds.

Shafie, who arrived to a cheering crowd shouting "lawan tetap lawan" at the airport, said he was wondering why he was not investigated while he was Rural and Regional Development Minister.

"When I was in the ministry, there were no problems. Why now?

"I have no links to the companies under probe," said Shafie, a former Umno vice-president who quit the party last year and later formed Parti Warisan.

He said that under him, the ministry had scored good marks for its performance in managing projects for the poor and rural communities.

"We have been scored 'good' many times. We performed. It is not that we did not perform," Shafie said.

He said that the ministry's performance was based on facts, not lies.

Shafie said he was opposed to the siphoning of government funds meant for the people and urged his supporters not to worry.

"When I was in the ministry, what was important was the people and country's interests, not my own," he said.

Shafie urged Warisan supporters to keep calm and not do anything that could jeopardise the party's political mission while the MACC conducted its investigations.

9. Najib announces RM2.56bil BRT system for Johor



Najib (centre), accompanied by Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin after launching the Johor Berkemajuan Ekspo at Kota Iskandar on Oct 7, 2017.

ISKANDAR PUTERI: Johor's Iskandar region will soon have its own Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system worth RM2.56bil.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak announced four initiatives for the state, including the BRT system and the latter will be in place by 2021.

He added that it would cover 90% of Iskandar Malaysia and will span over 51KM.

"We are also committed to spend RM360mil to develop more than 2,380 affordable homes in Johor by 2020," he said before launching the Johor Berkemajuan Ekspo held at Kota Iskandar here.

Najib also announced the launch of a technical and vocational education (TVET) master plan for Johor.

He added that a TVET training centre would be built in Kulai worth RM100mil, which can train 20,000 trainees annually.

Najib also said that there would be projects to enhance and find a balance between development and the conservation of nature, which was among the aspirations of the people, particularly the youth.

10. Three more arrested in Sabah rural projects graft probe



KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has arrested three more people in its probe into the alleged misappropriation of government funds meant for rural projects in Sabah.

Warisan Youth chief Datuk Aziz Jamman, 43, was arrested at 5pm Monday at the Sabah MACC headquarters in Kota Kinabalu after he was questioned by three investigators.

The other two arrested were Tenom Umno Youth chief Jamawi Jaafar, 43 and Tawau Umno Youth chief Ariffin Kassim, 44.

They were detained at the Sabah MACC headquarters and Tawau office respectively.

In an event here earlier, MACC chief commissioner Tan Sri Dzulkifli Ahmad said the MACC is investigating how RM1.5bil was siphoned from a total of RM7.5bil worth of funds allocated for rural projects in Sabah over the past six years.

On Thursday, Parti Warisan Sabah vice-president Datuk Peter Anthony and a businessman were arrested after giving their statements.

A 40-year-old former deputy undersecretary (infrastructure) from the Rural and Regional Development Ministry was also nabbed in Putrajaya over the case.

11. Policewoman claims trial to bribery

ALOR SETAR: A 28-year-old police sergeant pleaded not guilty to two counts of soliciting and accepting a RM2,000 bribe.

Afifah Zainal Abidin made the plea before Sessions Court judge Amernudin Ahmad on Monday.

On the first charge, Afifah, who was the Kota Setar district Narcotics Division assistant investigating officer, was accused of soliciting a RM2,000 bribe from Ahmad Termizi Mohd Izham via phone.

The latter was at Kota Setar Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) office when he received the call at about 11.40am on Dec 13, 2015.

The bribe was meant to delay Ahmad Termizi from being charged for an offence under the Poisons Act 1952.

MACC's A Hafiizh Abu Bakar prosecuted while counsel Ruzanna Abdul Halim represented Afifah.

The court allowed a RM7,000 bail with one surety and fixed Nov 13 for re-mention of the case.

12. Three youth leaders remanded over Sabah graft case



KOTA KINABALU: Three youth leaders from two political parties have been remanded for five days over an ongoing graft probe involving RM1.5bil worth of funds meant for rural development projects in Sabah.

The remand orders for Tenom Umno Youth chief Jamawi Jaafar and his Tawau counterpart Ariffin Kassim, as well as Parti Warisan Sabah Youth chief Azis Jamman, were issued after they were produced before Magistrate Cindy Mcjuce Balitus on Tuesday.

The magistrate also extended the remand of Warisan vice president Datuk Peter Anthony and a businessman, who were among three people first arrested in the probe.

The five men were brought at about noon to the Kota Kinabalu court complex, where hundreds of supporters had been waiting as early as 8.30am.

13. MACC officially arrests Shafie Apdal's brother

KOTA KINABALU: The Malaysian Anti Corruption Agency (MACC) has officially arrested Hamid Apdal about 10 hours after he turned up at the Commission's offices here at 10am on Monday to assist in investigations.

MACC officials said that he would be brought to court on Wednesday for an extension of his remand.

Prior to his arrest at 9.30pm, five MACC officers accompanied him to his house in Putatan where a through search was carried out for three hours in the afternoon.

It is learned that several files were taken, but MACC officials have declined to comment.

The MACC is expected to make more arrests as they sift through some 350 projects that were given to some 60 companies between 2009 and 2015.

The money was allegedly stolen from RM7.5bil worth of projects during that period in Sabah.

Many of the projects were allegedly uncompleted or failed to meet specifications though full payments were made to the companies.

MACC has so far frozen some RM170mil in bank accounts and assets in some of the companies involved in the project.

14. Hamid Apdal remanded for five days in Sabah rural projects graft probe



KOTA KINABALU: Hamid Apdal, the younger brother of Parti Warisan Sabah president Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal, has been remanded for five days starting Wednesday.

Hamid (*pic*) was brought before Magistrate Stephanie Sherron Abbie at about noon.

Malaysian Anti-Corruption Agency (MACC) prosecutor Mohd Faliq Basirudin had earlier applied for a seven-day remand, but the court reduced this to five days.

Hamid was arrested at 9.30pm Tuesday after being questioned for 10 hours by the MACC.

The MACC is expected to make more arrests as it sifts through about 350 projects that were given to some 60 companies between 2009 and 2015.

The money was allegedly siphoned from RM7.5bil worth of project funds.

The MACC has so far frozen RM170mil in bank accounts and assets of some of the companies involved.

15. MACC chief: It's corruption in our crosshairs, not politics

SEMPORNA: The ongoing probe into the siphoning of funds for rural poor projects is not a political witch-hunt but focussed on eradicating corruption, said Tan Sri Dzulkifli Ahmad.

"We are not investigating a political party. We are investigating any misuse or abuse of government funds meant to benefit the people," said the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Agency (MACC) chief commissioner, dismissing claims by Parti Warisan Sabah that the probe was politically-motivated.

"Our arrests are not targeting anybody specific, we also have arrested people from Warisan and Umno, among others," he told reporters after visiting the water treatment plant project at Kg Sungai Intan here.

Dzulkifli declined to specify if former rural and regional development minister Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal or any more of his brothers would be arrested.

Investigators suspect that some RM1.5bil might have been siphoned out through a network of companies that were granted contracts for the projects.

He said the water treatment plant in Kg Sungai Intan was an example of government funds not reaching the people.

"The project is completed but it is not able to function," he said, adding that people in the area had been waiting for 30 years for piped water.

"As a government agency, MACC wants to ensure that all projects are implemented with honesty and integrity. If anyone abuses their power or commits corrupt practices, we will act against them," he said.

16. Another family member of Shafie Apdal arrested in Sabah graft probe

KOTA KINABALU: Another family member of Parti Warisan Sabah president Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal has been detained in connection with a RM1.5bil graft probe.

A 37-year-old businessman, who is the son-in-law of Shafie's brother Hamid Apdal, was arrested by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) on Saturday.

MACC deputy chief commissioner (operations) Datuk Azam Baki confirmed the arrest.

The businessman was said to have been detained at about 5.30pm after turning up at the MACC office here.

Hamid was also among those held.

17. MACC: Corruption ranking for ministries to be ready end-Nov

PUTRAJAYA: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) is in the final stage of finalising the ranking of ministries in terms of corruption and abuse of power, prior to announcing it by the end of November.

MACC Deputy Chief Commissioner (Prevention) Datuk Shamsun Baharin Mohd Jamil said at the moment, the list was waiting to be submitted to MACC chief commissioner Tan Sri Dzulkifli Ahmad.

"The list has been completed by a committee of experts but has yet to be submitted to the chief commissioner," he said in his speech at the Corruption-Free Pledge by Federal Territories Ministry employees here Monday.

According to previous media reports, the list to be announced by the MACC comprises the 10 most problematic ministries and the five cleanest in terms of corruption and abuse of power.

Shamsun Baharin said Federal Territories Ministry was the 18th ministry to sign the corruption-free pledge, and the MACC hoped that all 25 ministries and the Selangor state government would sign the pledge by the end of this year.

"All state governments have signed the pledge except Selangor," he said.

A total of 320 ministry employees, led by its secretary-general Datuk Seri Adnan Md Ikhsan, signed the pledge on Monday.

Also present was Deputy Federal Territories Minister Datuk Dr Loga Bala Mohan.

18. Shafie Apdal's younger brother Yusof arrested in RM1.5bil graft probe



Datuk Yusof Apdal

KOTA KINABALU: Lahad Datu Umno Assemblyman Datuk Yusof Apdal, the younger brother of Parti Warisan Sabah president Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal, has been arrested.

Yusof was detained in connection with the graft investigations involving the skimming of RM1.5bil worth of rural development projects.

MACC deputy chief commissioner (Operations) Datuk Azam Baki confirmed the arrest on Tuesday.

It is understood that he was arrested at about 8pm after entering the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) office at about 5pm to give a statement in connection with several projects under the Rural and Regional Development Ministry that was headed by his brother between 2009 and 2015.

Sources said that his arrest was part of the ongoing investigation, during which they are expected to call in more suspects.

Another of Shafie's younger brothers, Hamid, was arrested last week and remains in custody, along with his businessman son-in-law.

The investigations are focused on 70 projects involving roads, electricity and water supply for rural areas of Sabah.

The investigations include incomplete projects as well as suspected corrupted practices in the implementation of the project.

More than 45 people have been questioned since the probe began two weeks ago.

This latest arrest brings the total number of arrests to nine.

When Shafie left Umno to form Warisan, Yusof, who is the Silam Umno chief remained with the party.

19. Dzulkifli vows to fight graft, will not bow down to "dirty" and "despicable" allegations

PETALING JAYA: Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) chief commissioner Tan Sri Dzulkifli Ahmad says he will not succumb to personal attacks and has vowed to fight corruption in the country without fear or favour.

"We will not bow down to pressure and we will continue to carry out our duties and responsibilities to ensure that the country is rid of those who are involved in corruption and power abuse," he said to TV3 during an interview.

Dzulkifli's remarks came following allegations that he was embroiled in an extramarital affair.

Dzulkifli labelled the allegations as dirty and despicable, with an intention to tarnish his reputation and to discredit MACC's efforts in combating corruption.

"I'm confident that these attacks were made following MACC's 'aggressive' actions against those involved in corruption and power abuse."

According to Dzulkifli, he has contacted Inspector-General of Police (IGP) Tan Sri Mohamad Fuzi Harun regarding the matter and the police are set to take further action.



Tan Sri Dzulkifli Ahmad.

Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Seri Dr Salleh Said Keruak had earlier advised Dzulkifli to remain steadfast and to not succumb to underhanded tactics aimed at undermining him.

Last year, the MACC moved against senior officials of the Sabah Water Department and recovered more than RM50mil in cash - the largest seizure in the country.

Three people have been charged in court so far in connection with the money-laundering case, also popularly known as the Sabah Watergate scandal.

As of July this year, the MACC had investigated 56 cases in Sabah which mostly dealt with false claims for projects which were purportedly never carried out.

Among the high profile cases MACC recently tackled was the probe into the skimming of up to RM1.5bil in federal projects allocations for the poor in Sabah through the Rural and Regional Development Ministry.

Last Tuesday, the MACC had officially arrested Hamid Apdal, who is the younger brother of Parti Warisan Sabah president Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal

The MACC is expected to make more arrests as they sift through some 350 projects that were given to some 60 companies between 2009 and 2015. The money was allegedly stolen from RM7.5bil worth of projects during that period in Sabah.

Many of the projects were allegedly uncompleted or failed to meet specifications though full payments were made to the companies. MACC has so far frozen some RM170mil in bank accounts and assets in some of the companies involved in the project.

20. Task force set up to monitor probe against MACC chief



PETALING JAYA: The Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC) has set up a task force over reports made against the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) chief.

In a statement, Attorney-General Tan Sri Mohamed Apandi Ali (*pic*) said the task force was formed on Monday (Oct 16).

"In view of the seriousness of the allegation that can affect the integrity of the chief commissioner of the MACC, the AGC has formed a task force... to closely monitor the investigations of the alleged offences under section 498 of the Penal Code and other related offences."

Section 498 refers to "enticing or taking away or detaining with a criminal intent a married woman".

Apandi, in his statement, cautioned and reminded all parties from making any comments than can jeopardise the ongoing investigations.

On Tuesday, Bernama quoted Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Seri Dr Salleh Keruak urging that MACC chief Tan Sri Dzulkifli Ahmad not to succumb to underhanded tactics to undermine him.

Salleh, writing in his blog, was responding to allegations of an extramarital affair against Dzulkifli.

21. Shafie Apdal expected to be remanded today



KOTA KINABALU: Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal is expected to be brought to the magistrate's court here later Friday (Oct 20) to be remanded.

The Parti Warisan Sabah president, who turns 60 on Friday, was arrested late Thursday (Oct 19) after turning up at the Sabah Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) office here to have his statement recorded.

The former Rural and Regional Development Minister was later taken to Queen Elizabeth Hospital for overnight observation due to high blood pressure, his lawyer and Warisan deputy president Darell Leiking said.

Shafie is the 10th person held in connection with a graft probe into the alleged skimming of up to RM1.5bil in federal project allocations in Sabah through the Rural and Regional Development Ministry.

Among those arrested were Shafie's brothers Hamid and Yusof.

The MACC is expected to make more arrests as it sifts through about 350 projects that were given to some 60 companies between 2009 and 2015.

The money was allegedly siphoned from RM7.5bil worth of project funds.

The commission has so far frozen RM170mil in bank accounts and assets of some of the companies involved.

22. Tanjung Bungah landslide: Ministry says developer's application was rejected



PETALING JAYA: The developer's application to build a residential project at the site of a massive landslide that has taken the lives of nine construction workers was rejected by the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry as it was located near a quarry site.

"The development site is located right next to a granite quarry. Teik Granite Quarry, which is a permanent granite quarry that started operations in 1960," the Ministry said in a statement on Sunday.

The Ministry said it initially received an application from the developer of the residential project, Taman Sri Bunga Sdn Bhd for the "Permohonan Kebenaran Merancang" (Planning Permission Application) on Jan 9, 2015 but was subsequently rejected later that month.

It said the quarry site performed blasting twice a month and the last was done on Oct 9.

The Ministry said that it did not support the developer's application as there was no sufficient buffer zones between the apartment project and the quarrying activities nearby according to the Guidelines of Siting and Zoning of Industries and Residential Areas.

"The quarrying activities are only 162 metres away from the crushing site and between 400 to 500 metres from the blasting site of the quarry.

"It is therefore not a safe and peaceful environment for people to live in," it said.

It added that the development also consist of steep slopes that required detailed engineering study which may require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) approval.

"Unfortunately, they decided to ignore our advice and went ahead with the construction with blatant disregard to the lives of the workers," it said.

The Ministry also expressed its disappointment at the Penang state government's "lack of oversight" of the project despite its objections to the from the beginning.

"What is perplexing is that there was no interference from the state government which raises more questions than answers," it said.

It also urged the government to re-examine its plans to further develop any hill side projects.

23. Yusof Apdal freed on RM100k bail



KOTA KINABALU: Lahad Datu assemblyman Datuk Yusof Apdal (*pic*) has been released following a six-day remand as part of investigations into the siphoning of RM1.5bil of Sabah rural projects.

Magistrate Cindy Macjuce Balitus ordered Yusof freed on a RM100,000 bail following an application by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission.

Yusof, the younger brother of Parti Warisan Sabah president Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal, was taken to the court complex here at about 10am.

He was hugged by family members as soon as he stepped out from the courtroom after the 10 minute hearing.

Yusof was detained on Oct 17 after turning up at the Kota Kinabalu MACC office to give his statement in connection with several projects under the Rural and Regional Development ministry between 2009 and 2015.

24. Najib's economic vision for Malaysia



PETALING JAYA: Days before the 2018 Budget is to be unveiled on Friday (Oct 27), Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak (*pic*) has penned thoughts on his economic vision for Malaysia.

The Prime Minister has pledged to correct the problems of the past and to make the country more competitive at home and abroad.

Here's the statement in full:

MY ECONOMIC VISION FOR MALAYSIA

24th October 2017

1. As we approach Budget 2018, I would like to share some thoughts about the challenges Malaysia has faced over the last few years and how I have tried to steer our country towards a prosperous, sustainable and inclusive future for all.
2. I want to explain my thinking ahead of the Budget on Friday and the plans we will announce then which, as always, will be for the benefit of all Malaysians.
3. My entry into the world of politics was abrupt and unplanned. It was prompted by the sudden death of my father, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, when I was 23.
4. I had idolised him for his achievements and for his relentless dedication to see our nation and our people progress. Since then, my goal in life has always been to do my best to follow in his footsteps and serve the country.

5. Like my father, I too want to put Malaysia in the global stage; to be among the top 20 nations in the world by 2050. No accomplishment can ever be greater than putting Malaysia on the best track for its future. That is my vision for our Transformasi Nasional 2050 (TN50) initiative.

6. And we have certainly made huge progress. This is why the World Bank endorsed what this Government has been doing, and why it concluded in its last country report: "The Malaysian economy is progressing from a position of strength."

7. Yet when I became Prime Minister in 2009, the economic challenges we faced were enormous. When I took office that April we were right in the middle of the great global recession, the worst since the 1930s. Being an open economy and dependent on international trade, Malaysia was severely affected. Our exports dropped 20% while our economy contracted sharply by 6.2% in the first quarter of 2009.

8. There were serious structural and legacy issues that had led to low wages which did not catch up to inflation, expensive cars, high poverty rates, income inequality, frequent highway toll-rate hikes, declining education standards, poor public transpiration, lop-sided Independent Power Plant (IPP) agreements, and rampant crony capitalism. All of this combined was damaging the people's welfare.

9. We were also over-dependent on oil and gas and commodities, and development in the country was unequal, with Sabah, Sarawak and the Peninsular east coast states lagging behind. The situation required decisive action and clear direction.

10. So, first of all we immediately implemented two big economic stimulus packages worth RM67 billion to pump money into our economy, to revive it and save it from an even deeper contraction.

11. Through this decisive action we saved the Malaysian people from the pains of going through a deep recession, such as happened in 1997. Then, the KL Stock Exchange plunged by more than 50 percent, thousands lost their jobs, businesses went bankrupt, and there was real and widespread suffering.

12. The Global Recession of 2008-2009 was devastating to many countries, including advanced nations that have still not recovered today. Because we were swift to act, however, Malaysians were relatively shielded from its impact. It was nothing like 1997.

13. The stimulus packages did lead to a 10% jump in our Debt-to-GDP ratio to above the 50% level. But the measures worked and Malaysia recovered quickly. By the year's end, our economy started growing again. This was a remarkable turnaround.

14. That ratio has stabilised at below 55%, which is well below the level of most developed nations - the UK's last year was nearly 90%, for instance. The opposition, however, tries to use this increase in debt to mislead Malaysians and claim we are going bankrupt. This is ridiculous. In 1986, Malaysia's Debt-to-GDP ratio reached 103%, and we didn't go bankrupt then! This shows that when they speak

about the economy, the opposition mostly just spread propaganda and blatant lies for their selfish political interest. This has a name - economic sabotage.

15. Secondly, we knew that we had to undertake wholesale reform. We knew that to escape the middle-income trap and achieve our goal of becoming a high income status nation, we had to have an overarching, prudent economic plan - a roadmap, with key performance indicators and measurable outcomes so that we could test our progress and make sure we were keeping on track.

16. That plan was the National Transformation Programme, with its key component, the Economic Transformation Programme, or ETP. Some people have called that "Najibnomics" - I didn't come up with the name! But I don't mind people using the term, as seven years on we can see that the plan - which has the good of the Malaysian people at its heart and is its overriding aim - has delivered, and continues to deliver.

17. Gross National Income has increased by nearly 50%. We have narrowed the gap towards the high income target from 33% to 19%.

18. 2.26 million jobs have been created, of which more than one million are high income jobs.

19. This March, our exports reached RM82.63 billion - the highest monthly figure for Malaysian exports ever recorded.

20. Inflation and unemployment have been kept low. Due to a policy of engagement abroad, we have attracted unprecedented levels of Foreign Direct Investment, which shows the confidence the world has in Malaysia.

21. In 2017 alone we have seen 14 business MOUs between Malaysia and China worth RM144 billion, 31 business MOUs between Malaysia and India worth RM158.4 billion, as well as a USD7 billion investment in Malaysia by Saudi Aramco. These will bring thousands of new jobs, transfers of skills, and improved standards of living for countless families.

22. And over that time, despite the huge turmoil in the global economy, the oil shock, and the disastrous recessions that hit much of Europe, almost destroying some countries, we registered year upon year of healthy growth. The World Bank recently revised their prediction for Malaysia's growth to 5.2% for 2017 - the second time they have done so this year!

23. Those are some of the major milestones the Government and millions of hardworking Malaysians have marked under the plan we put in place in 2010.

24. But there are many, many other more specific moves the Government has taken to improve standards and help the people.

25. We introduced education blueprints for our schools and universities; and now we are seeing our universities starting to move up the international rankings steadily.

26. We are a nation of road users, which is why we encouraged Khazanah Nasional and EPF to buy PLUS Expressway outright in 2010 from the private holders. This means that every Ringgit collected now goes back either to the Government or to EPF account holders.
27. PLUS-owned highways such as the Penang Bridge, the Second Link and the North-South Expressway have also not seen any increase in toll rates since the buyout in 2010.
28. At the same time the roads have been upgraded - for example, large sections of the North-South Expressway have been expanded to three or four lanes compared to two lanes in the past.
29. Other aspects of public transportation had, however, been severely neglected by one of my predecessors. He wasted billions on vanity projects instead of building the world class infrastructure that Malaysia needs, both to attract investors and to serve the people.
30. Under my Government the first phase of the Mass Rapid Transit project was completed at the end of last year, and the second phase of the Sungai Buloh-Kajang MRT Line was launched in July. We now have 51 kilometres of operational line with 31 stations.
31. These projects created 130,000 new jobs, of which 70,000 are direct employment. And best of all, they were completed ahead of schedule and RM2 billion below budget. We are now planning for MRT 2 and 3, while in a few years' time we will also have the first high-speed rail link connecting Kuala Lumpur to Singapore, which will cut travel time between the two cities to 90 minutes, as compared to more than four hours by car.
32. But it's not just about the Klang Valley or the west coast. Far from it. Our focus has been on other parts of Malaysia that had been neglected for far too long - because we wanted our development to be fairer, more inclusive, and to raise all sectors of the population and parts of our country.
33. Kelantan, for instance, had been deliberately starved of development funds and deprived of critically-needed upgrades to their water infrastructure for decades by a former leader, just because it was held by an opposition party.
34. To me, this is not fair, as clean water is essential for life and is the right of all Malaysians. Therefore, we helped Kelantan with a water restructuring agreement last year that will cost more than a billion ringgit.
35. The people in Kelantan had also suffered from poor transportation links - resulting in many people having to endure slow, congested and dangerous car journeys when traveling between states.
36. To address this, our Government is building the toll-free Central Spine Road to connect Kelantan with the rest of the peninsula, while phase 3 of the East Coast Expressway will soon extend to Kelantan.

37. The East Coast Rail Link will soon be yet another game-changer for the east coast states.

38. When it comes to Sabah and Sarawak, never has any Federal Government provided as much in the way of yearly allocations and development projects for them - unlike in the past. The Pan Borneo Highway, to take one example, will be a huge spur for development and connectivity in East Malaysia.

39. I strive to be fair to all states - including the opposition-held states. For example, the Government has entered into a water restructuring agreement with Penang and Selangor to help them reduce their state debts and provide much needed revamps of their water supply infrastructure.

40. In the case of Penang, the water restructuring package in 2010 involved helping the state government reduce its debt by RM655 million, while giving them an additional grant of RM1.2 billion to expand a dam. This allowed the DAP State Government to boast that they had reduced their state debt by 95%, although this was in fact due to the Federal Government's efforts.

41. Our efforts to make sure all Malaysians benefit from a rising economy have helped us register a stunning reduction in our poverty rate. Hard core poverty in Malaysia dropped from 3.8% in 2009 to just 0.4% in 2016. In Sabah alone, we had managed to reduce the rate from 19.7% in 2009 to just 2.9% last year.

42. The people's income per capita has also increased from RM27,819 in 2010 to RM40,713 in 2017. Our monthly median income has increased from RM4,585 in 2014 to RM5,288 in 2016. And we have also seen an improvement in B40 household income - which has grown to RM3,000 in 2016 from RM2,629 in 2014.

43. As a result, our GINI ratio - which measures income equality - dropped from 0.441 in 2009 to 0.399 last year, the lowest in Malaysia's history. Malaysia's income equality has never been better.

44. At the same time, we know that cost of living issues hit those on low incomes the hardest, and this is why we distributed RM5.36 billion in 1Malaysia People's Aid, or BR1M, to 7.28 million households in 2016, and we introduced the minimum wage.

45. A former leader recently described BR1M as an abuse of government funds - but he should try telling that to the recipients. It is frankly cruel-hearted for anyone in the opposition to talk of taking away a programme that is designed to help ease the burden of millions.

46. Everything we have done has been for the good of the people. And that includes taking many tough but necessary decisions that were not always popular.

47. We needed to rationalise subsidies that were insufficiently targeted. They were blanket subsidies on various goods, such as petrol, which had started during a former leader's time and had

ballooned to unsustainable proportions. By 2012, for instance, fuel subsidies alone had reached RM25 billion and accounted for 13.6% of the total national Budget.

48. Many of the people who benefitted were well-off, rather than the money being spent on those who needed it most. So what we did instead is channel funds to the Bottom 40 in a targeted manner, which we believe is a more prudent and ethical way to distribute public money.

49. We needed to reduce our reliance on revenue from oil and gas, which contributed 41% of Government income in 2009. This left us exposed and overly dependent on a non-renewable resource whose long-term future is in doubt as countries and industries turn to green energy solutions.

50. We were successful in this, and oil and gas supply only 14.6% of Government revenues in 2017. This early decision was fortunate as the crash in global oil prices in 2014 showed.

51. The last time that global prices for Malaysia's major commodity exports crashed was in 1985. Back then we were unprepared, and our economy quickly entered a deep recession.

52. This time, however, we were prepared, due to the Government's insistence on ensuring the resilience of our economic fundamentals. Although we were still affected by the global oil price crash in 2014, unlike many similar petroleum exporting countries, Malaysia not only managed to avoid recession but our economy continued to grow.

53. One of the measures that was crucial to this was the Goods and Services Tax, or GST - the source of one of the opposition's main attack on the government.

54. Many have falsely alleged that GST is an entirely new tax, put in place just for the purpose of bringing in more revenue for the Government. In fact, it was a replacement for the sales and service taxes, which were inefficient, complicated and not working well for either consumers or businesses.

55. If raising revenue was our only intention, it would have been easier to raise existing corporate, income and the sales and service taxes. But doing that would have been bad for local businesses, and off-putting to international investors.

56. In fact, since I became Finance Minister in 2008, we have reduced corporate taxes from 27% to 24%. Personal income tax rates have also fallen, from 28% in 2008 to 24% now for the majority of Malaysians.

57. We also raised the tax threshold so that those whose income is RM4,000 or below no longer have to pay any income tax - unlike in the past, where those who had salaries of even RM2,000 were taxed. These are all incentives for individuals and businesses to excel, as they keep a significantly higher percentage of the fruits of their labour.

58. So GST should not be considered an additional new tax but part of a comprehensive tax reform that is designed to make Malaysia more competitive, to control the black and illegal economy, to reduce tax evasion and broaden the overall tax base.

59. Since Malaysia implemented our GST in 2015, many other countries, such as India and Egypt, have followed suit, while all the Gulf Cooperation Countries - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates - will implement their GST on January 1 next year.

60. And our economic plan has led to Malaysia's GST rate only needing to be 6% - far lower than other countries who don't share our strong economic fundamentals.

61. The vast majority of countries - over 160 around the world - have implemented a GST because they know they need it to make their countries stronger and more competitive. Strangely, the opposition claims not to understand this. They want to abolish it - but with no suggestion about how they would make up the RM41 billion GST raised last year.

62. I also want to be very clear that the claim that GST was necessary to pay for 1MDB is an absolute lie - as the politicians making this false claim know very well.

63. 1MDB in fact played a key role in solving the lop-sided power agreements signed by a former leader. When 1MDB entered the industry, it was the lowest bidder in all its agreements, thus saving Malaysia RM200 billion over the next 20 years. One research house's report about the revised power agreements was simply titled "No more sweetheart deals".

64. 1MDB has also funded the construction and upgrades of eight military bases which past governments were unable to do. It has also funded thousands of scholarships and Hajj trips for pilgrims.

65. Now it is true that 1MDB has had its share of problems, and we long ago revamped the management to correct the mistakes and bring it back to financial health.

66. But when the Bandar Malaysia project agreement is signed, you can expect 1MDB to make a decent profit that will more than recover its losses. And the lie that the people have had to pay for 1MDB's decisions will be nailed once and for all, as after the rationalisation programme is completed it is very likely that 1MDB will have made a profit for the people - not to mention all the corporate social responsibility work it has done over the years.

67. Lastly, I want to address issues around our currency, the Ringgit. When the US suffered from the effects of the Great Recession in 2008-2009, they started reducing interest rates - which led to global funds moving their funds into countries such as Malaysia in search of a higher return.

68. Our Ringgit benefited from this and appreciated 30% from RM3.73 to the US dollar when I first became Prime Minister to below RM3.00 in 2011-2013. However, when the US started to recover from their recession, they started raising interest rates again.

69. This, coupled with the drastic drop in commodity prices, caused our Ringgit to weaken to its current value - which is now another topic that the opposition uses to criticise the government.
70. It is strange that the opposition is now claiming that the current weaker Ringgit is a sign that Malaysia is going bankrupt - when in GE13, the opposition also alleged that Malaysia was going bankrupt despite the Ringgit having appreciated 30% against the US dollar!
71. Pegging the Ringgit and re-imposing capital controls would have been the easiest thing for me to do. Having suffered from a lack of investment after we had imposed capital controls and pegged our Ringgit from 1998 to 2005, however, we decided not to do it again.
72. It is true that the Ringgit weakened amidst the global turmoil and uncertainties since 2014, but there have been positive aspects to that, as our exports and tourism boomed.
73. And while some have painted it as weak, our Ringgit actually performed better than the currencies of many other large commodity exporter countries. As our economy continues to perform well - as all forecasters predict it will - our Ringgit will regain its strength and an appropriate market rate.
74. You won't hear about all this from the opposition or a former leader. A former leader who is obsessed by power and wanted to continue ruling long into his retirement, and who blamed me for his son's loss in the race to be UMNO's vice-president in 2013.
75. I had refused to conform to his ways as I firmly believed that Malaysia needed a new vision, away from the old ways that had led to the serious legacy problems that we had faced before and which were damaging the people's welfare.
76. As a country, we must move on to the next phase to be a developed high-income country where the standard of living and the quality of life for Malaysians is the top priority. This is my vision for Malaysia - a cause that is much bigger than myself. Malaysia has always punched above our weight, and I believe in our tremendous potential as a country.
77. That potential has been recognised by many international institutions such as the OECD, the IMF and the World Bank. They have repeatedly praised the Government's macroeconomic management and structural reforms, while a survey co-authored by the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania earlier this year declared Malaysia to be the 'Best Country to Invest In'.
78. All the major credit ratings agencies have reaffirmed Malaysia's status within the "A" band, and the verdict of the OECD was that: "Malaysia is one of the most successful Southeast Asian economies... thanks to sound macroeconomic fundamentals and its success in transforming its economy into a well-diversified and inclusive one."
79. These are the results of the economic plan this Government put into place after I took office in 2009. The tough decisions we took were not always popular - but they were necessary, and they

have spared Malaysia from the ravages of recession and the turbulence that has afflicted the global economy. We have acted as a responsible Government, always seeking to protect our people and look after their welfare and security.

80. In a few days, I will be presenting Budget 2018 where new initiatives and several major announcements will be revealed to benefit all Malaysians.

81. This Budget will continue to be guided by my goal to correct the problems of the past and to make Malaysia stronger, more competitive at home and abroad; to create a Malaysia that protects the vulnerable and is fair to all: a Malaysia where none of our brothers and sisters are left behind.

25. Yusof Apdal: MACC probe not politically motivated



KOTA KINABALU: The probe into the skimming of RM.15bil worth of federal rural projects for Sabah is not politically motivated, said Lahad Datu assemblyman Datuk Yusof Apdal.

He refuted Opposition claims that the probe by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) was politically motivated.

"I want my supporters in Lahad Datu not to be influenced by such opposition claims. They (MACC) wants to get to the bottom of certain matters and the probe had nothing to do with politics," he said but declined to reveal the issues investigated by the MACC.

Yusof said Wednesday said that there were people from the Opposition trying to influence his supporters that he was a political victim.

"Yes, we are brothers. We don't agree politically," said Yusof Apdal from his hospital room at the Jesselton Medical Centre here where he sought treatment after his release on Monday from a six day remand.

Yusof and Shafie, the Parti Warisan Sabah president, were among 13 detained by the MACC over the investigations into the skimming of RM.15bil worth of federal rural projects for Sabah between 2009 and 2015.

Shafie, a former vice president and Rural and Regional Development Minister before he formed Warisan in 2016, is still in remand till Friday.

Yusof, who is the Silam Umno division chief, said that he made his stand very clear that he would stay loyal to Umno when his brother left the party to form his party.

"I am loyal to the party, our president Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak and deputy Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and our Sabah Umno chairman Tan Sri Musa Aman.

"I will remain with the party to ensure we win the next elections," he said, adding that the Silam Umno division - the largest in terms of branches and members in the country - was intact and fully supported the Umno leadership.

Yusof said that he was prepared to brief the leadership on issues pertaining to the MACC investigation if requested as the matter was not personal.

On his health, he said that he had a serious hemorrhoid problem that might need some surgery and it would take him about a week before he is discharged from the hospital.

He said the MACC was very professional in their treatment of him during his detention and had allowed him out twice to seek outpatient medical treatment during his six-day remand.

26. Ex-assistant administrator remanded in graft probe



SHAH ALAM: A former assistant administrator with the Selangor mentri besar's office has been remanded for three days for allegedly accepting bribes.

Magistrate Khairul Nizam Abu Bakar granted the remand order on the 38-year-old woman together with a 59-year-old company owner and his wife, aged 52.

All of them are being investigated under Section 17(a) of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009, which carries a jail term of up to 20 years and a fine of RM10,000 or five times the amount of the bribe, whichever is higher.

The main suspect is believed to have accepted RM16,566 last year from the company owner as an inducement for the company to be recommended as souvenir supplier to the mentri besar's office.

The couple were picked up at 3.30pm later the same day.

27. Budget 2018: Better work benefits for civil servants



PETALING JAYA: As a token of appreciation for the 1.6 million civil servants nationwide, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak announced several increased benefits for the group in his Budget 2018 speech.

In his speech delivered in Parliament on Friday, the Prime Minister introduced a second time-based promotion for supporting staff, which applies after 13 years from the first promotion.

To provide further flexibility at the workplace, new working hours from 9am to 6pm have been introduced.

Flexible working hours for one day a week has also been offered to Medical Specialists of Grade UD54 and above who have served a minimum of four years and meet certain requirements.

Mothers in their fifth month of pregnancy and above will be allowed to leave work an hour earlier together with their husbands, provided that both work in the same location.

The Government will also introduce a more holistic approach to encourage life-long learning among public servants through in-house Masters and PhD programmes.

Special leave for education officers will be increased from seven to 10 days and public servants can apply for up to seven days of unrecorded leave days throughout their service for umrah purposes.

Najib also announced that civil servants who retire due to medical reasons would receive the same benefits as those who come under compulsory retirement.

Civil servants can also receive cash in lieu of accumulated leave of no more than 150 days taken during the last year of employment before retirement.

Other benefits announced include a minimum pension of RM1,000 a month, which will benefit more than 50,000 retirees.

Additionally, medical facilities will also be extended to parents of retirees.

Budget 2018 photo gallery



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Zahid Hamidi holding the Budget 2018 report after tabling it in Parliament on Friday. - AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star

28. MACC sifting through flow of RM48mil cash 14

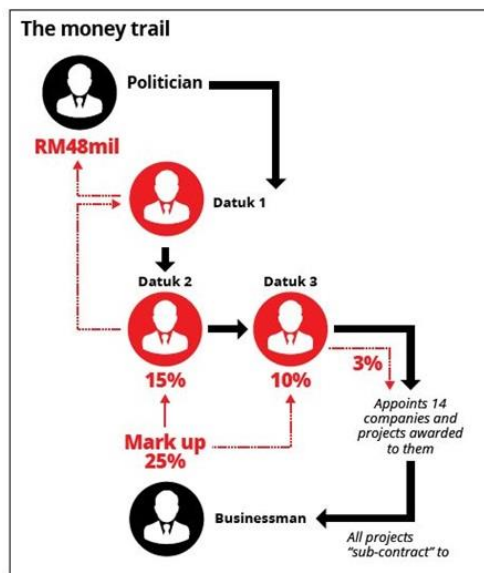
PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) is zeroing in on how RM48mil of Government funds meant to uplift the rural poor was moved across an intricate web of companies.

The graftbusters are said to be probing 14 Sabah-based companies, said to be involved in the "disappearance" of the money over seven years, which is part of the RM1.5bil misappropriation of funds that MACC is looking into.

It was discovered that the main "formula" for the embezzlement involved an inflation of the project prices by 25% where in the end, 15% which is equivalent to RM48mil, had gone into the pockets of others

His two brothers - Datuk Yusof and Hamid - were also sought to facilitate the probe. Both siblings were released last Monday and on Oct 19 respectively.

The MACC is also investigating the role of two Datuks in the money trail and who had appointed them.



"We have questioned Shafie's brothers to seek their assistance on this matter.

"The RM48mil which has been siphoned off may only be the tip of an iceberg of how deep this alleged misappropriation of funds can be.

A complicated business channel was used to blind the authorities and most of the dealings were done in cold hard cash to avoid traces, sources told *The Star*.

These sources said MACC is investigating whether family members and political supporters were involved in the entire tender and awarding of selected projects to the 14 companies, believed to be appointed by a Datuk.

This Datuk pulled together 14 companies that he did not necessarily own, but which he exerted much influence as it belonged to his family and friends.

Instead of honouring the projects, the MACC wants to know whether "the 14 companies were used mainly for namesake and all the projects were unofficially subcontracted to a well-connected businessman, who has direct links to the politician."

The prices of the projects were said to have been marked up by 25% where 15% went to one of the Datuks, who then channelled it to others.

"We believe the other 10% went to one Datuk who appointed the 14 companies, out of which 3% was divided between the companies as a 'service fee'," sources added.

Sources said that only companies based in Sabah were appointed in what is believed to be a move for political expediency and "to reward political cronies".

The sources also said that the investigations were almost completed and the MACC would be proceeding with its next course of action. Shafie was released on Friday after an eight-day remand.

He was out on a RM100,000 bail by a magistrate's court.

29. Azalina: AG ordered further investigations into 1MDB on Oct 24



KUALA LUMPUR: The Attorney-General Tan Sri Apandi Ali on Oct 24 instructed further investigations into 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) to be carried out even though police had concluded its investigations in September.

According to Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said, the Government was not able to divulge any details on the matter as the investigations into the state investment arm were still ongoing.

"Further investigations into 1MDB are currently being done by the police who acted based on the A-G's instructions on Oct 24.

"Since the matter is still under investigation, any details of the case cannot be revealed as this would only jeopardise the police efforts, besides causing prejudice into the case," she said.

Gobind had asked as to why there was a delay in concluding the case although the police have submitted the investigation papers to the A-G Chambers on April 12.

Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Mohamad Fuzi Harun had on Sept 20 said the police have concluded their investigations into 1MDB and there was no need to investigate the case further.

However, he had said the police would act if there were new instructions issued by the Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) or the federal cabinet.

Police had formed an investigation team in April 2016 to scrutinise the PAC report on 1MDB, following a PAC report tabled in Parliament.

Former IGP Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar had in June, directed the police to further investigate 1MDB, based on the investigation papers that were submitted.

The United States Department of Justice had on June 15 filed the latest in its series of 1MDB-related civil forfeiture suits.

30. Project's final approval came from Penang authorities

PETALING JAYA: The final approval for the development of the apartment blocks in Lembah Permai, Tanjung Bungah, came from the local authorities under the state government and not the Federal Government, according to the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry.

The Penang Island City Council (MBPP), however, says it followed guidelines by the Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government Ministry.

The Natural Resources and Environment Ministry said it and the Federal Government are not interested in politicising the tragic incident on Oct 21 that took the lives of 11 people. Neither was there any deliberate misinformation as suggested by Bukit Bendera MP Zairil Khir Johari.

"The unnecessary loss of lives could have been avoided if the state government had adhered to the advice of the relevant agencies and prevailing rules and guidelines," the ministry said in a statement yesterday.

Instead, DoE only questioned the site's proximity to a nearby granite quarry, he said.

He also claimed there were "double standards" by DoE which he said did not object to other developments closer to the quarry, including the Tunku Abdul Rahman College.

The ministry said it was appalled at the MP and the Penang government for "turning the tragedy into a platform to attack the Federal Government and civil servants who were merely doing their jobs".

In George Town, MBPP said the terminology "flat land" was used to describe the construction site in Tanjung Bungah based on guidelines by the Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government Ministry that "any development below 150m is categorised as flat land".

"For the Class II height with a slope gradient of 15° to 20° under the flat land category, high-density developments are allowed," it said in a statement yesterday.

It also stated that the Tanjung Bungah site was inclined and the contour was between 18m and 40m.

The council was responding to a rebuttal by Tanjung Bungah assemblyman Teh Yee Cheu, who posted on his Facebook page 10 photographs of the land he took between 2014 and 2015 before constructions began, following numerous announcements about the "flat terrain" of the site.