

Daim: KiniBiz put words in my mouth

In a long letter to KiniBiz, former finance minister and corporate czar Daim Zainuddin said KiniBiz put words in his mouth when it headlined part of an interview “[Daim: Najib too soft](#)”. While Daim added that otherwise [the interview](#) was on the whole correctly reproduced he also took issue with an earlier [series of articles](#) on him.

We reproduce below Daim’s letter in full and follow that with a reply by assistant news editor Khairie Hisyam who wrote the articles and interviewed Daim.

Dear Sir,

I refer to the series of articles on me and the interview with me recently.

I have long ago decided that in dealing with the press my motto shall be “never explain, never complain”. Sometimes I forget myself and give interviews and would then later rue the decision. Invariably and without fail, there would be reporting by innuendos, rehashing of so called facts where untruths repeated often enough, becomes the truth.



And the reporter then relies on the previous “report” and so it goes on. Even if the report tries to be factual, the slant of the news is biased.

A recent example of this is the recent comment by The Edge on the sale of the ICB Banks. Whilst it duly acknowledged that I set up the first ICB bank in 1994, and it is public knowledge that I had sold UMBC in 1985/86 , it could not resist adding “when Daim was Finance Minister from 1984 to 1991, many of the banking assets were held by Tan Sri Robert Hua Choon”. Facts obviously cannot get in the way of bias and slants.

In the case of your recent publication, whilst the interview was on the whole correctly reproduced, you couldn’t resist the temptation of putting words into my mouth with a sensational headline of “Daim: Najib is weak.” (Editor’s note: The headline actually said “[Daim: Najib is too soft](#).”)

It is however in reporting about my business interests that a fog descends on most reporters – it is as though that there is only one narrative that must be repeated ad nauseum: that my wealth was acquired by illegal means and that there is no legitimacy in my being in business before and after I left the Government.

There were many inconsistencies and insinuations too. Just to name a few: big mining ponds that I paid for, was written as me “acquiring a lucrative piece of land due to Daim’s close association with Selangor MB Dato Harun”; my being both chairman of Peremba and a shareholder in Sime UEP, was deemed “a conflict of interest”. I was not Chairman of Sime UEP, both Peremba and I were shareholders. How can this be a conflict? But then again let’s not get facts in the way of an agenda.

Another was “Daim reportedly sold his stake to Pernas at a profit”. I sold it at my purchase price and holding cost. In fact I lost money as I had to pay tax of RM10 million under a legislation that I introduced as MOF.

Further, in writing about Temasek’s sale of Bank International Indonesia (BII) to Maybank wherein you wrote that “Daim’s ICB was reportedly part of the consortium and held 13.3% immediately after the buy-in”. A simple check would have shown that at that point of sale, we were no longer shareholders of BII, having sold our stake to Temasek earlier for a small profit. I wanted to concentrate on my own bank there. If I had known that a few months later that Maybank was silly enough to pay such an exorbitant price for BII, I would have held on to my stake and made a lot more money.



“ If I had known that a few months later that Maybank was silly enough to pay such an exorbitant price for BII, I would have held on to my stake and made a lot more money. ”

- Daim Zainuddin

In part 4 of your article, you linked various personalities to me. In my three quarters of a century old age, there are many people I know, dealt with, helped along and some I am still friends with today and some I have lost contact with. There are “six degrees of separation” between me and everyone else in this world. To put together all these pieces and then come up with conjecture and speculation is surely a sign of

an active imagination on the part of your newspaper. Btw, there are two Zakaria Abdul Hamid, one is a Tan Sri and you have confused them as one same person.

The slant in your story is that again there must be something behind a simple act of divestment. There are no smoke and mirrors, no cloak and dagger, no clandestine plans. I do not understand why the press is still obsessed with me and reads so much into any action on my part.

My life is really simple. In the first phase of my life I decided that I wanted to be a successful businessman. And if I may be so immodest to say so, I was very successful, very very rich. I made money through both hard work and street smarts. The critics can say that I got my break when I bought a piece of state land from then MB Dato Haron. Yes, I knew him but that land was not a lucrative piece of land as your report puts it. It was mining land – I bought big huge ponds and whatever land there was, had 2,000 squatters that I had to re-site at my own cost. And many others before and after me got government land, but where are they now? Other than that, I was not a recipient of any government projects, privatizations projects nor was I a beneficiary of the NEP as I was born too early. I'm not quite a rags-to-riches story but if for example, a Boon Siew's or a Robert Kuok's rise can be applauded, then maybe it would have been nice if that same courtesy could have been similarly extended to me. But I'm a Malay Bumiputera businessman so therefore it must be impossible for me to successful without Government help.

The next phase of my life was when I joined the Cabinet. By the 1980s I was bored. I was rich. I had taken a break to further my education and there was nothing new to challenge and excite me. There was nothing to prove and nothing to motivate me. The offer to join the Cabinet was a new and exciting change.

I was already rich when I joined the Cabinet. I did not become rich after I joined. If as you said that I own nearly a billion ringgit worth of shares and assets and had to divest as I was a Minister, that cash sat idle for seven years and earned pittance to what I could have done with it if I were still active in business. But making more money was not my objective. Been there, done that.

“ I'm not quite a rags-to-riches story but if for example, a Boon Siew's or a Robert Kuok's rise can be applauded, then maybe it would have been nice if that same courtesy could have been similarly extended to me. ”

- Daim Zainuddin

After I left the Cabinet, I needed another challenge and Malaysia was, again been there, done that. I started small with one branch banks and in countries where no one went or wanted to go. These countries were very welcoming, they appreciated my confidence in them. Even in Indonesia, when everyone was leaving Indonesia in droves, we went in. Africa was considered a basket case but I have been there before I was 20 and fell in love with the continent. Its not difficult to be rich and successful if you are brave, confident and willing to take a risk in what you believe in.



“ Africa was considered a basket case but I have been there before I was 20 and fell in love with the continent. Its not difficult to be rich and successful if you are brave, confident and willing to take a risk in what you believe in. ”

- Daim Zainuddin

And now in my final chapter, I divest and concentrate on charity. There is no time nor inclination to go back to what I have left behind, either in business or in politics.

Daim Zainuddin

12th March 2014

Khairie Hisyam replies:

In an emailed letter to KiniBiz last week, businessman and former finance minister Daim Zainuddin responded to the two issue series that were published over two weeks.

On the first four-part series titled “[Daim, the godfather of corporate Malaysia](#)”, Daim claimed that there were many inconsistencies and insinuations which led to biased reporting.

Among others, Daim defended his [personal acquisition](#) of 33% equity in Sime UEP in 1982 via a private vehicle while at the same time being chairman of Peremba, which at the time owned 33% interest in Sime UEP.

“I was not Chairman of Sime UEP, both Peremba and I were shareholders. How can this be a conflict?” wrote Daim to KiniBiz.

However it is worth remembering that as chairman of Peremba which owned 33% of Sime UEP before his private vehicle bought in, Daim would have had access to intimate knowledge on Sime UEP which may or may not have been an advantage in his personal buy-in into the company.

So there lies the conflict of interest — should he have acted in personal capacity when he had access to intimate knowledge obtained as a duty-bound chairman of Peremba?

In addition Daim shed some further light on his prior dealings which KiniBiz touched on in this series. He also claimed that KiniBiz indulged in “conjecture and speculation” in the [fourth part of the series](#) when examining the various corporate figures previously linked to him and their recent business moves.

However Daim’s connections have been well-documented by academic research. In drawing these links KiniBiz had relied on credible sources including previous news reports, historical records and academic writing.

As for the recent business activities that KiniBiz highlighted, they were factual. It is only fair to observe the emerging trend and ask if something is in the works, a question which KiniBiz posed to Daim himself. And Daim had made his denial in the interview with KiniBiz.

Daim: KiniBiz put words into my mouth

The second series, which also had four parts, was based on an exclusive interview with Daim and was titled “[The Daim interview](#)”. While acknowledging that the interview was “on the whole correctly reproduced”, Daim claims KiniBiz had put words into his mouth by titling the first part of the series “[Daim: Najib is too soft](#)”, which he felt was a “sensational headline”.



However it must be pointed out here that a headline is very rarely a direct quote from an interviewee. Rather, a headline’s purpose is to inform the prospective reader, at a glance, what the message contained in the body of the story is.

On the article in question, the headline served to summarise the comments by Daim with regards to Najib Abdul Razak's leadership in a nutshell. Accurately paraphrasing, summarising and describing what an interviewee said on record is very different from putting words into someone's mouth.

KiniBiz has always held itself to high standards of journalism . Accuracy, impartiality and fairness are among the values we strive to uphold with every story.