

Department of Justice
Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, June 11, 2021

U.S. ENTERTAINER/BUSINESSMAN AND MALAYSIAN NATIONAL CHARGED WITH BACK-CHANNEL LOBBYING CAMPAIGN TO DROP 1MDB INVESTIGATION AND REMOVE CHINESE DISSIDENT FROM U.S.

A federal grand jury in the District of Columbia returned a superseding indictment Thursday charging a U.S. entertainer and businessman and a Malaysian national with orchestrating an unregistered, back-channel campaign beginning in or about 2017 to influence the then-administration of the President of the United States and the Department of Justice both to drop the investigation of Jho Low and others in connection with the international strategic and development company known as 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), and to send a Chinese dissident back to China.

According to the superseding indictment, Low Taek Jho, 39, also known as Jho Low, and Prakazrel “Pras” Michel, 48, are alleged to have conspired with Elliott Broidy, Nickie Lum Davis, and others to engage in undisclosed lobbying campaigns at the direction of Low and the Vice Minister of Public Security for the People’s Republic of China, respectively, both to have the 1MDB embezzlement investigation and forfeiture proceedings involving Low and others dropped and to have a Chinese dissident sent back to China. Michel and Low are also charged with conspiring to commit money laundering related to the foreign influence campaigns. Michel is also charged with witness tampering and conspiracy to make false statements to banks.

In May 2019, Michel and Low were charged in the District of Columbia for allegedly orchestrating and concealing a foreign and conduit contribution scheme in which they funneled millions of dollars of Low’s money into the U.S. presidential election as purportedly legitimate campaign contributions, all while concealing the true source of the money. According to the indictment, to execute the scheme, Michel received Low’s money and contributed it both personally and through approximately 20 straw donors.

If convicted, Low faces a maximum penalty of five to 10 years in prison, per count. If convicted, Michel faces a range of maximum penalties from five to 20 years in prison, per count. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Deputy Assistant Attorney General Kevin O. Driscoll of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division; Special Agent in Charge Keith A. Bonanno of the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General Cyber Investigations Office; Assistant Director in Charge Kristi Koons Johnson of the FBI’s Los Angeles Field Office; and Assistant Director in Charge William F. Sweeney Jr. of the FBI’s New York Field Office made the announcement.

The Justice Department's Office of the Inspector General and the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office and International Corruption Squad in New York are investigating the case.

Principal Deputy Chief John D. Keller, Deputy Director of Election Crimes Sean F. Mulryne, and Trial Attorney Nicole R. Lockhart of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section are prosecuting the case.

An indictment is merely an allegation and all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.