

MPs urge ACA to probe Sarawak CM
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DAP parliamentarians today called on the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) to investigate Sarawak Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud.

Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang said the claim that Taib's wealth, in addition to that of his family, are estimated to be in the billions should be sufficient reason to carry out an investigation.

He raised the issue in the Dewan Rakyat during the winding-up speech by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz.

"The RM32 million in kickbacks (for timber deals), that was highlighted by the international media, is just the tip of the iceberg," said Lim.

"We are not talking millions, or even hundreds of millions, but billions! He has accumulated such a vast amount of wealth," he added.

The opposition leader was referring to a news report in the Japan Times which claimed that Japanese shipping companies paid RM32 million to a Hong Kong agent allegedly linked to Taib (photo, left).

In response, Nazri, who is also de facto law minister, said there are many corruption allegations levelled at people.

"The allegations are many, but not all complaints lead to prosecution. People need to be responsible when hurling accusations.

"You have accusations made by anonymous bloggers and newspapers sometimes pick up on certain issues. Just because there is an allegation, does not mean it will lead to a conviction," he added.

Discreet probes

However, Chong Chieng Jen (DAP - Bandar Kuching) said the corruption allegations against the Sarawak chief minister should not be considered as a normal case.

"These ministers are not ordinary people. This particular case involves a chief minister. (News articles from) Japan and Hong Kong have publicised the link," he said.

"It is a real shame to the country and the cabinet that strives to combat corruption. The government must explain what is happening," he said.

Responding, Nazri said the ACA carries out discreet investigations from time to time.

"What the ACA does is not made public. Just because a person is of high profile does not mean we have to go after that person. All are equal under the law," he added.

At this juncture, Lim asked if the ACA has investigated Taib's 'billions'?

Nazri replied that an investigation must be based on valid sources and pointed out that many allegations are made anonymously.

"My point is that we need to verify the information. How can we verify if the information is posted anonymously... We must have sources. There is no change in policy," he said.

Unusually rich wife, son

Later, Chong said the government must also take note of the increasing wealth among the family members of politicians.

"His [Taib's] wife (Laila) has 37 million shares in (mega cement manufacturer) CMS, and his son (Sulaiman) 22 million shares. It shows impropriety, but there has yet to be any investigation on how the family members are able to obtain such wealth," he added.

Chipping in, Lim claimed that the ACA is not willing to investigate Taib and described the agency as a "toothless paper tiger."

"I believe they (the ACA) have access to his account and the opposition is oversimplifying the matter.

"If a family has managed to accumulate wealth, it is not necessarily linked to corruption. The accumulation of wealth does not automatically mean corruption," replied Nazri.

Taib, who is the country's longest-serving chief minister, is believed to be one of Malaysia's richest politicians.

His family has wide-ranging business interests in Sarawak since Taib took office 25 years ago. This is mainly through public-listed conglomerate Cahaya Mata Sarawak and many of its subsidiaries, which Taib's wife, has a substantial stake.

It has been estimated that Taib's family is worth at least RM2 billion, though this is not officially confirmed.