

Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!
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Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!...

Even journalists covering the Dewan Rakyat proceedings could not recall how many times Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz repeated this word.

His target was none other than the Opposition Leader, Lim Kit Siang. The two heavyweights locked horns over corruption today.

Unhappy with the lengthy explanation provided by Nazri on Malaysia's poor placement in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Lim quizzed him on the corruption allegation against Deputy Internal Security Minister Mohd Johari Baharum.

Johari was accused of receiving RM5.5 million in bribes to free several criminal suspects held under the Emergency Ordinance (EO). The deputy minister denied this but an investigation was launched.

"How can he (Johari) come clean when the ACA (Anti-Corruption Agency) has not released its findings, and when the Attorney-General (AG) also keeps mum?" asked Lim.

This question irked Nazri, who retorted:

"Malaysia will never develop as long as we have people like Lim. All these (corruption allegations) are lies. Why are you so stupid? Where are the allegations? You have no brains. Stupid, stupid, stupid!..."

"All these are lies. Where is the RM5 million? There is no RM5 million, which means the allegation is not true.

"If you want to know why the AG is keeping quiet, you should ask him and not me. I cannot answer on his behalf because I will be accused of influencing him."

Lim, who was also seeing red by this time, responded: "The AG is not here. But you are here. And you have the responsibility to answer."

Speaker: No ruling

At this juncture, DAP MPs rose to defend Lim and urged Dewan Rakyat Speaker Ramli Ngah Talib to make a ruling against Nazri for using improper language in the House.

However, the Speaker refused to do so.

"Improper language is used all the time in Dewan Rakyat. If I make a ruling every time it happens, we will not have any time for debates.

"Even though I don't encourage rudeness in the House, I will not make a ruling. However, I

hope MPs will be more careful with the language they use in future," he said.

This prompted Nazri to throw in a sarcastic comment: "Since stupid is not proper, I will use 'not smart' instead."

Earlier, Nazri (BN-Padang Renggas) was responding to Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail (PKR-Permatang Pauh) who asked Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to state if he is focussed on fighting corruption since Malaysia's ranking in the CPI was on the slide compared to neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam and Singapore.

While agreeing that the ranking had deteriorated, Nazri, however, argued that the CPI does not reflect the real corruption situation in the country.

"We were ranked 39th in 2005 and last year we were ranked 44th. However, more countries were included in the study last year compared to 2005," he said.

"Furthermore, the report is based on perception and is contrary to the real situation. Nevertheless, the negative perception must be treated as a lesson by everyone in order to work harder to fight graft," he added.

Singapore - not a real country

The minister also said that Malaysia must not be compared to countries like Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam.

"Singapore is not a real country, it is a small island. Singapore's population is just three to four million and there are no opportunities for corruption, unlike in our country.

"As for Vietnam and Indonesia, I understand that they received lower rankings last year. But being among the first 200 is not difficult. But once we get to be among the first 40 or 50, it is difficult (to improve) as we have reached a bottleneck," he added.

Wan Azizah then asked if the government plans to allow the ACA to be answerable to Parliament in view of the many corruption allegations, especially against top politicians such as Johari and Sarawak Chief Minister Taib Mahmud.

"We have a freer media now that allows many voices to be heard. That is why we have many people making unfounded allegations in the media," responded Nazri.

Citing the Johari case as an example, Nazri said the allegations had appeared on blogs and anybody could create a blog.

"All these are people's perceptions which cannot be made as a basis for charges," he said, proposing instead on a more tighter control of the media.