

Gov't DC charm offensive goes behind closed doors
Malaysiakini.com
Feb 25, 2010
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A high-profile seminar on the Malaysian government and judiciary in Washington DC by a prominent international think-tank Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) was strangely turned into a closed-door event.

The seminar titled 'Governance and Rule of Law in Malaysia' featured prominent Malaysian government officials before an audience of US government officials, activists, diplomats and Malaysian expatriates.

In the CSIS announcement sent out last week, it stated that the two-hour seminar was "on the record". But organisers made a U-turn on the matter.

Law Minister Nazri Abdul Aziz (*right*) was the sole Malaysian representative.

Attorney-general Abdul Gani Patail and Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission's advisory panel chairperson Abdul Hamid Mohamad were also invited speakers but were absent.

Instead, Nazri's entourage included an unusual mix of government and opposition federal lawmakers along with Deputy Dewan Rakyat Speaker Ronald Kiandee.

The MPs present were Tajuddin Abdul Rahman Keong (PKR - Hashim Jamaluddin also the US.

Expectedly, particularly government's Ibrahim

disappointed with Abdul Gani's absence and the organiser's request for the seminar to be kept off the record.

(Umno - Pasir Salak), Wee Choo Wangsa Maju), Zahrain Mohd (Independent - Bayan Baru) and Jarjis (Umno - Rompin), who is Malaysian ambassador to the

the US audience and press were keen on questioning the handling of the on-going Anwar sodomy trial and was thus

Ex-envoy: Strange seminar

Before the seminar commenced, senior adviser and director of the CSIS Southeast Asia Program Ernest Bower barred attempts by *Malaysiakini* to record the session on video.

When told that the invitations for the seminar did not specify that the seminar was a closed event, Bower brushed it off by saying that it was quite normal for CSIS seminars to be kept off the record.

Seminar participant and former US envoy to Malaysia John R Malott told *Malaysiakini* that

the seminar was the "strangest" that he had attended in Washington DC.

"I found it unusual that the session was off-the-record. This is very rare for a Washington think-tank," he said.

"The seminar was very strange because there were supposed to be three speakers, but throughout, only one person, Minister Nazri, was there. Abdul Gani never came at all."
Malott (*left*) said he had hoped Abdul Gani would be present because he had specific questions regarding the conduct of the prosecution team in Anwar's sodomy trial.

He said that the prosecution is required by law to give the defence team whatever evidence necessary for the accused to mount a defence but prosecutors are doing the exact opposite.

"How can they convince us (that it is a fair trial) when they withhold vital information needed defend someone. In America there is no question about this. It will be certainly hard to convince us that this trial is fair," he said.

Seminar cut short

During his 40-minute speech, Nazri spoke about laws in Malaysia which promotes good governance and how he was instrumental in the formation of the National Integrity Plan, Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission and other instruments to curb graft.

Nazri also lauded Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's commitment towards combating graft and promoting good governance. He added that he would resign if Najib ever interferes with the MACC.

Before the question-and-answer session began, Amnesty International representative T Kumar urged the seminar organisers to open up proceedings to the press.

"That is the right thing to do," said Kumar, who is the Amnesty International's Asia and Pacific advocacy director.

Despite Nazri's nod of approval, Bower replied with a firm "no", adding that he will not backpedal on his decision.

Following this, Nazri was quizzed on the sodomy trial, the Internal Security Act and the controversy surrounding the use of the term 'Allah' by non-Muslims.

Before he answered the question about the 'Allah' controversy, Nazri told the *Malaysiakini* reporter not to report his answer before his lengthy reply.

Bower abruptly ended the brief 20-minute session after Nazri answered the third question. According to Bower, the Malaysian entourage had to rush off to another engagement.

PKR MP's participation not unusual

Meanwhile, PKR secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution described Wee's presence at the event as nothing out of the ordinary.

"I do not think that it is peculiar because it is very normal for MPs to go on delegations, whether the opposition or the government. In fact, my last trip to Japan was with Parliament speaker Pandikar Amin Mulia and other MPs from BNBC (Barisan Nasional Backbenchers Club).

"We cannot stop CSIS from inviting us. But we do have our stand on the speech given (at the seminar). However, the participation by our MPs is not against Pakatan Rakyat's stand. So I think that it is perfectly normal for Wee to attend the event."

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/125141>