

Nazri's speed leaves MPs fuming

BY ELIZABETH LOOI

THE MPs call him Speedy Gonzalez or bullet train. Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz earned this nickname after he sped through the pages of his replies while winding up the debate on the Budget at policy stage on Monday.

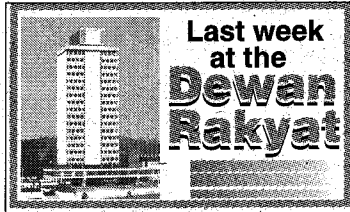
In the process, the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department did not give MPs a chance to seek clarification.

Many felt that even with limited time, a minister should allow at least one question from an MP.

Nazri's contention was that he had 84 pages of replies to read and he could not afford to allow clarification.

"If there is any question, please ask me during the committee stage or write to me," he told Karpal Singh (DAP - Bukit Gelugor) when the opposition veteran interjected.

"I had to finish reading my answers because (Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department) Senator Datuk Abdul Raman Suliman had about 40 pages on EPU (Economic Planning Unit) and (parliamentary secretary Datuk Dr) Mashita Ibrahim had about



20 to 30 pages of answers.

"We had about 140 pages of replies to read. I'd planned to allow them to ask questions after I finished but they kept interrupting me," said Nazri.

Nazri's act even caught the attention of Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

It happened when Najib was about to wind up the debate for the Defence Ministry. Fong Po Kuan (DAP - Batu Gajah) stood to say that Nazri had rushed through his answers so that he could give the floor to his boss.

"It was an irresponsible behaviour of an executive and it shows that the executive is controlling our Parliament," said Fong.

Nazri denied that he was rushing because of Najib.



Nazri: 'I'd planned to allow them to ask questions after I finished but they kept interrupting me'

"After Najib finished winding up, he asked me why the opposition was so unhappy. I explained to him the situation," he said.

Eight DAP MPs, including Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang, were so frustrated with Nazri on Monday that they

walked out of the House as a show of protest. Fong and Karpal Singh stayed behind.

Although the opposition was unhappy with Nazri, the backbenchers seemed to think that it was "acceptable" for a minister not to give way.

Deputy Speaker Datuk Lim Si Cheng, who had been chairing proceedings at the time, said Nazri was not going against any Standing Order as he had every right to refuse to give way.

"It is up to the minister. He can use his discretion when a backbencher stands up to ask for *penjelasan* (clarification)."

He also said there had been a few occasions when ministers rushed through their answers due to time constraint.

Si Cheng, however, said MPs could only ask for clarification such as further explanation to the answers given by the minister.

"According to Standing Order 35 (4), a member (of the House) can only ask questions related to the minister's answers. The member is not allowed to start discussing an entirely new topic,"

he added.

Karpal Singh agreed that it was the minister's right to not allow interruptions and that was not against Standing Order.

"But the point is, he (Nazri) should give way for questions. I was shocked. It was irresponsible of him not to take queries," he added.

In supporting Nazri, Datuk Idris Harun (BN - Tangga Batu) said there was nothing wrong for him not to allow interruptions.

Idris said Nazri was not rushing to prepare the floor for Najib but it was a matter of time management.

"Najib was scheduled to read his answers at 2.30pm, so it was just time management to ensure that everything went as scheduled," he added.

He said that although the MPs did not get a chance to seek clarification, he was certain that Barisan MPs were satisfied with the reply.

"Nazri had also read the letter by Attorney-General to clarify the case of the tsunami fund," he said.

The meeting has adjourned for the fasting month until Nov 6.

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