

Abdullah will not intervene

AUSTIN (Texas): For the moment, at least, the Prime Minister is not going to intervene in the controversial decision by Backbenchers Club chairman Datuk Shahrir Samad to quit.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said he had been told that BN MPs were trying to persuade Shahrir to change his mind.

"I will see how they can resolve the problem. I will not say anything for now," he told reporters covering the World Congress on Information Technology here.

Abdullah has kept abreast of the turn of events which led to Shahrir's decision to throw in the towel.

Shahrir resigned on Thursday after most BN MPs voted against an emergency motion to refer a news report in the *New Straits Times* to the Rights and Privileges Committee. He said that decision was based on the principle that his views were no longer backed by the members.

Cross-section of sawn timber 'must not exceed 60 inches'

PUTRAJAYA: Any sawn timber, with or without a hole in the middle, which exceeds the 60-inch cross-section will be seized by the authorities. This is in accordance with the regulation introduced by the Government in 2002 following the ban on the import of logs from Indonesia.

"With or without a hole, the cross-section must not exceed 60 inches or you contravene the law. It is as simple as that," said a Malaysian Timber Industry Board spokesman.

He was referring to a statement by Jasin MP Datuk Mohd Said Yusof that the 60-inch cross-section of sawn timber was debatable.

Mohd Said said this on Thursday when admitting that he had asked the Malacca Customs and Excise Department to close an eye over a case involv-

ing the import of sawn timber recently. The MP stated that his reason for doing so was based on a technicality.

"Take into account the hole in the middle of the timber and the bark that would be shorn off, and the size would not have exceeded the 60 inches cross-section," he had reasoned.

Mohd Said also stated that there would not have been any loss of revenue as there were no taxes or royalties to be paid to the Government.

The agent who brought in the timber was compounded and the consignment was seized.

The *New Straits Times* front-paged on Thursday a report of an MP who allegedly asked the Customs Department to "close one eye" over the import of sawn timber in Malacca.

The spokesman said if a measure-

ment was carried out, the question of whether there was hole or not in the timber, big or small, did not arise.

"Being the implementing agency, we are just following the rule and if you want to import timber, make sure you toe the line."

He said the board only assisted the Customs Department in identifying species of timber and those flouting the law.

Many non-compliance cases, he said, had been reported in Batu Pahat, Sungai Rambai and Sungai Linggi every year. It was up to the department to act against the offenders.

Meanwhile, a senior Customs Department officer said inspections and raids at Sungai Rambai barter trade point were intensified in March following reports on the shortage of sugar in the country due to smuggling.

Investigate me, says MP

PUTRAJAYA: The Malacca MP who admitted asking the Customs Department to close one eye over a case involving the import of sawn timber has challenged that he be investigated.

Declaring his innocence, Datuk Mohd Said Yusof, the Jasin MP, said: "Investigate me, by all means."

The controversy which followed a report in the *New Straits Times* on Friday of an unnamed MP who asked Customs to "close one eye" following the seizure of sawn timber from Indonesia, has led to the resignation of Backbenchers Club chairman Datuk Shahrir Samad.

Yesterday, Mohd Said confirmed he met Malacca

Customs director Md Hashim M. Pardi and prevention chief Rumanor Sarif to discuss the seizure.

However, he argued that he was not abusing his power but only doing his bit as an MP "for a Bumputera company in trouble".

"I asked them to issue a compound and not seize the whole consignment... at least the company would only lose about RM500 in compound payment."

Mohd Said expressed regret that it was because of his "case" that Shahrir resigned.

"That's why I told the Press I was the MP mentioned in the paper. I need to end speculation and cool the situation down."

He said he was not in the House when Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang tabled the motion to refer the *New Straits Times* to the Rights and Privileges Committee, otherwise he would have supported the move as he felt the matter should be handled by the committee.

The MP charged Customs personnel tipped the media of his interference in the Malacca case so as to tarnish his name.

On Tuesday, while debating the Supplementary Supply Bill, Mohd Said claimed Customs director-general Datuk Abdul Rahmad Hamid was "acting more like a politician than a civil servant".



Mohd Said expresses regret

Asked whether it was the backbenchers' stand not to support any motions to censure one of their members, Mohd Said replied: "If we were to look from that angle, it could be so... but in my case, I did not do it to protect my interest."

Disciplinary action against Shahrir?

WILL disciplinary action be taken against Johor Baru Member of Parliament Datuk Shahrir Samad for supporting an opposition motion?

The Barisan Nasional Backbenchers Club chairman's fate lies in the hands of deputy Prime Minister and Barisan Nasional Whip, Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

Barisan Nasional deputy Whip and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz said Najib would make a decision on the matter.

He said he had spoken to Najib on the matter on Thursday and "it is up to him now."

On Thursday, Shahrir had supported a motion by Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang seeking to refer the *New Straits Times* to the Rights and Privileges Committee over an article. The article had highlighted an unnamed MP who had allegedly asked the Customs and Excise Department to "close one eye" on the seizure of sawn timber from Indonesia.

Lim reckoned the report had cast aspersions on the House and its members.

Shahrir agreed but backbenchers disagreed with him.

He immediately quit his post as BBC chief, citing differences in opinion with members.

Asked if his action in support-

ing the motion had gone against the party line and the Whip, Shahrir on Thursday said he had not.

"This is not a party matter. If it is a party line, Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz will say I should be expelled from Umno. But this is not the case. It is not a party matter," he had said.

However, at a Press conference yesterday, he admitted that he resigned "as I had breached the party's directive against supporting an Opposition motion".

During last year's budget session, two Barisan Nasional backbenchers who supported an Opposition motion were issued warnings by the Whip.

Datuk Bung Moktar Radin (BN-Kinabatangan) and Datuk Mohamed Aziz (BN-Sri Gading) apologised for their actions.

Both had supported a motion by Lim to refer International Trade and Industry Ministry secretary-general Datuk Sidek Hassan to the Rights and Privileges Committee.

On June 22 last year, Deputy Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk S. Sothianathan was suspended for three months from his post after breaking ranks with the Government in Parliament over the withdrawal of recognition for the Crimea State Medical University in Ukraine.

'Action must be taken against Said'

KUALA LUMPUR: Disciplinary action should be taken against Jasin Member of Parliament Datuk Mohd Said Yusof for asking the Customs Department to "close one eye" in a case involving sawn timber in Malacca.

Transparency International chairman Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam said the MP could be referred to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Rights and Privileges or face party action.

"Otherwise, it will be embarrassing for the party and

the Government as we are talking about an all-out fight against corruption."

He said the case was under public scrutiny as it had been highlighted by the *New Straits Times*.

Navaratnam said it would reflect badly on the Government's action to fight corruption if no action was taken against Mohd Said.

On the motion by Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang that the NST article on the matter be referred to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Rights and Privi-

leges, he said this was the right thing to do.

Johor Baru MP and Backbenchers Club chairman Datuk Shahrir Samad had supported the motion which was shot down by Barisan Nasional backbenchers in a vote.

The NST article had stated that an MP had asked the Customs and Excise Department to "settle" the matter but was not entertained.

Yesterday, Mohd Said admitted in Parliament that he was the MP mentioned in the report.



Navaratnam says the case is under public scrutiny