

Nazri: Dr M interfered

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been reminded of his promise not to interfere in the administration of the country after his retirement.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz said the action of the former premier in issuing statements questioning the Government's decision to cancel the bridge project to replace the Johor Causeway was interference in government administration.

He said Dr Mahathir was "wrong on all points" in his comments on the scrapped bridge project.

While Dr Mahathir was free to criticise, Nazri said the elder statesman was making open criticisms to undermine the Government which he had once been a part of.

"My Cabinet colleagues and I hope that Tun will keep to his promise when he said that he would not interfere in the government administration when he retired," he added.

Nazri said that contrary to Dr Mahathir's opinion, the Cabinet had been consulted before a decision was made to scrap the project.

Of the 32 Cabinet ministers, 21 were senior members appointed by Dr Mahathir when he was prime minister.

"When Tun said that the country was 'half-past six with no guts', he is directing his comments at the Cabinet which comprises many members appointed by him.

"I don't think that Tun meant what he said. If not, questions

may arise on his personal integrity, and I don't think that he is 'half-past six with no guts'.

"We respect Tun as someone who had given so much to the people and country in the past. But it doesn't mean that Tun is given a blank cheque to criticise without inviting a reply from someone who disagrees with his criticisms, especially the Government's right to defend itself," Nazri said in reply to points raised by MPs on the bridge issue during the debate on the Supplementary Supply (2005) Bill 2006.

Nazri said the issue of Malaysia surrendering its sovereignty to Singapore by not building the bridge did not arise.

"One end of the bridge is on Singapore's side, and we have no right to build (it) if we fail to obtain permission from them," he added.

He also said that Dr Mahathir's accusation that the Cabinet was only interested in selling sand was untrue and a wild allegation.

"It was Singapore and not the Cabinet which brought up the sand issue in the later part of the negotiations. Because of this, we rejected the (bridge) project," he added.

Nazri also said Ambassador-at-large Datuk Fuzi Abdul Razak had given a complete explanation on the issue.

"For Tun to say that Fuzi was rambling, I think that Tun has no basis to dispute the points raised by Fuzi," he added.

Nazri said he had no intention to be rude to Dr Mahathir, adding that the Government had already made its decision



Nazri: 'The Cabinet had been consulted before a decision was made to scrap the project'

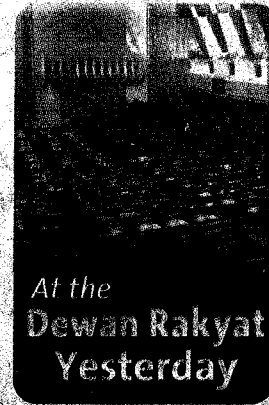
and would not budge from it.

Later, Nazri told a press conference at the Parliament lobby that Dr Mahathir's comments that the Government was "half-past six with no guts" amounted to saying the Government was "useless".

He said Dr Mahathir was free to criticise but people could question his sincerity.

"Asked whether he was stating the Government's stand on the issue in the Dewan Rakyat, Nazri replied: "The Government's stand is not to continue with the bridge project. Therefore, I believe that any action taken to defend this stand is also the Government's stand.

"You can give your criticisms. When you go beyond that - sending out letters to MPs and division heads - that is tantamount to undermining



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the Government leadership.

"I take full responsibility for what I had said (in the Dewan)," Nazri said.

"It is the Government's decision not to proceed with the bridge project. It is not a question whether I got the green light. It's my job.

"I'm a member of the Cabinet. No Cabinet member can run away from the responsibility to defend the decision of the Cabinet anytime, anywhere," he stressed.

He elaborated that Dr Mahathir's criticisms had generated a lot of unhappiness among the MPs.

"By not answering is amounting to saying that what he said is true.

"I hope Tun will not feel offended. By calling the Government half-past six with no guts, you should know better that I've got more guts. If I don't

answer, it will only confirm what he (Dr Mahathir) had said.

"Nobody should say I have no respect for the former prime minister or that I did not take into consideration what he had done for the country."

Earlier in the Dewan Rakyat, Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang labelled Cabinet members as "hypocrites" in accepting the decision to scrap the project when they had unanimously agreed to the bridge project before this.

To this, Nazri said that Dr Mahathir had made the decision on the bridge before it was brought to the Cabinet for discussion.

"Whatever statements made on the bridge before were conditional on the situation that succeeds it. We had to get advice from the Attorney-General and we want to continue the negotiations until we get a straight bridge.

"When MPs and the people were unhappy, the Government made its latest decision," he added.

Nazri said the Government believed that it had a case if the matter was brought to the International Court of Justice.

"But Singapore has a case too. We could have wasted five, six or 10 years and caused friction in our relations with Singapore. So we decided to stop the project," he added.

In the Dewan Rakyat earlier, Datuk Rosli Mat Hassan (BN - Dungun) asked the Prime Minister's Department to explain the bridge issue to MPs.