

Lim, Nazri cross swords

At the Dewan Rakyat

by Zainon Ahmad
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

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It was a rare treat for the younger MPs, for the young government officials and for the visitors in the public galleries to watch the verbal duel between two political adversaries – great debaters both – on Tuesday as they thrust and lunged at each other.

The fine gay blade that he is and confident as Minister in the Prime Minister's Department on whose behalf he was speaking, Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz had still to depend a lot on his youthful agility to step nimbly backward and out of harm's

way whenever his more experienced opponent, Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Ipoh Timur), lunged furiously at him.

In a sense both were equally matched and had the stamina to cross swords for close to three hours even though Nazri was cheered on by far more supporters than veteran oppositionist Kit Siang could ever hope to command.

The opposition leader, with his seat at the head of the pew opposite the Prime Minister's seat and almost next to the Speaker, was at a slight

disadvantage. To address the Speaker, to whom all his remarks must be directed to, to gesticulate at Nazri and to look for approval and support from his party members sitting beside him as well as behind him, he occasionally had to do a pirouette.

But the minister, twelve seats away from the Speaker was fortunate. By only just slightly turning his head he had everyone in his sight – the government backbenchers, Kit Siang and the Speaker.

But as they thrust and parried with each other alert and watchful for an opening to drive his foil home, a lot of what had happened in the country but had thus far remained trapped in the nether world of rumours and blogosphere entered the public domain.

Thus the Dewan Rakyat heard allegations of fabulous wealth of Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman, former Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam and Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud.

Nazri was, of course, responding to the points raised by Kit Siang and other MPs during the debate on the address by the Yang diPertuan Agong when opening the current session of Parliament three weeks ago.

But the opposition leader was dissatisfied with the answers given by Nazri on the migration overseas and brain drain of about a million of the best and brightest of "Malaysian sons and daughters" for over three decades.

The minister, who is MP for Padang Rengas, denied that it was due to claims of "unfair and discriminatory nation-building policies" but more because of being attracted to the better salaries offered by employers abroad – more like "ants attracted to sugar."

They went on and on covering much the same ground on such issues as the aborted Inter-Faith Commission, nation-building, corruption and even the wielding of the *keris* by Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishamuddin Hussein at the Umno general assembly.

When he refused to give way to M. Kulasegaran (DAP-Ipoh Barat) to intervene on point of order, remarks of "takut, takut" were heard from the ranks of the DAP MPs. "Tak takut lah," bristled Nazri saying loudly that he was capable of taking on both "Ipoh Timur dan Ipoh Barat" together.

When Karpal Singh (DAP-Bukit Gelugor) queried the minister about what the government was doing about

the corrupt judges on the bench alluded to by Chief Justice Tun Ahmad Fairuz Sheikh Abdul Halim in a newspaper report, Nazri said the newspaper concerned had misreported what Ahmad Fairuz said.

Another rare treat for the MPs was the presence in the Dewan Rakyat on Monday of the largest contingent of ministers seen during question time for a long time – 11 or a third of the numbers in the national cabinet.

"Surely a sight for sore eyes," remarked a government backbencher as he walked past the press box. There were only two on Tuesday and Thursday.

The Human Resources Ministry was completely unrepresented on Monday but Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Ministry parliamentary secretary Datuk Rohani Abdul Karim read out the answer to the original question directed at the ministry.

Had Speaker Tan Sri Ngah Talib moved on to the next question without allowing supplementary questions to be asked the poor woman would not have to endure shouts of disgust and derision from the opposition members when she said that written answers would be sent to the members.