

Politicians say the darndest things on 1MDB

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1Malaysia Development Bhd issues are complicated affairs. Is that why politicians say weird, even downright false things when it comes to this troubled company? Someone should politely advise them to zip it, really.

It is that time of year again when the foot-in-mouth disease strikes. The latest victim: Tourism and Culture Minister Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz.

If you haven't heard, in mid-June the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) alleged that 1Malaysia Development Bhd or 1MDB funds were indirectly channelled towards bankrolling the 13th general election campaign for Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

For the record, 1MDB has denied this. But it is not an issue at all even if the report was true, said Nazri.

“If the report carried by WSJ is proven true, then it is good, as it shows the money was not lost. Then why do you (critics) say the money is lost? What's wrong with (Finance Ministry wholly-owned 1MDB's) money being spent on the people?” he told Malaysiakini.

Presumably of course Nazri said these with a straight face, serious tone of voice and without any hint of mirth. In which case one wonders how his mind, which must be exceedingly brilliant since he holds an actual Cabinet position, works.

Imagine taking money out of your wallet to pay your electricity bills. But when you pay, the person behind the counter smiles, winks knowingly and says the money will go towards paying your water bill instead.

Smile, the person might say, the money is still being spent on your household, so the money is not lost. You might reasonably be expected to reach calmly across the counter, caress the other person's neck with your loving palms and strangle it in fury – if you have anger management issues, that is.

Only no, in the now-hypothetical 1MDB scenario the money is not spent on the people but allegedly funded the prime minister's election campaign. So how does that equal spending money "on the people" as Nazri claimed?

A man of mysteries it seems, Nazri. Because equally mysterious is how a man who admitted to not knowing whether government funds can be used during general elections can end up holding such high office.

In any case, maybe the Ministry of Culture has been experimenting with alternative interpretations of straightforward logic and Nazri is just testing the waters for a potential unveiling of ground-breaking discoveries.

Of course Nazri is not new to alternative interpretations. Remember how Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak was criticised as being less than his father, a former prime minister, by ex-premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the latter's string of hits over the 1MDB issue and other things?

Cue Nazri to the rescue, riding ahead of a tell-tale wave of English language renaissance (or not). Najib is a chip of the old block, he said, an idiom which he claims means one cannot be greater than one's father.

Then again maybe this is a contagious thing. Nazri is far from the only minister to be afflicted with the 'alternative interpretation' fad, consequently saying silly things on record about 1MDB.

There was Minister of Finance II Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah in early June who, on live television, proudly exclaimed that 1MDB's short-lived joint venture with PetroSaudi International, a Saudi Arabian entity, in 2009 paved the way for Syarikat Prasarana Bhd to win a RM125 million contract earlier this year.

This forced former Prasarana chief Shahril Mokhtar to clarify afterwards that there is no such link to PetroSaudi in the contract win.

And Husni also separately said that 1MDB's auditor Deloitte hasn't started its audit because it is going through 1MDB's subsidiaries first – which is simply wrong as audits should begin with the holding company first.

Even Husni's fellow ministers in the Finance Ministry, the sole shareholder of 1MDB, have been caught wrong-footed in mid-June. A case in point is the RM540 million loan from the Export-Import Bank of Malaysia (Exim) to 1MDB.

What was the loan for? Deputy Minister of Finance Chua Tee Yong said the money was for buying land in Pulau Indah while another deputy Ahmad Maslan said the money was for maintaining power plants and related operations.

The list goes on. And with every gaffe, false statements and correction, one thing is increasingly clear: maybe these ministers don't quite know what they're talking about, eh?

In which case it may be better for them to not say anything at all. Better stay silent and be thought a fool than to talk nonsense and certify it, as they say.

Or maybe Nazri has an alternative interpretation of that saying too...

GRRRRR!!!

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