

## **'I never praised Shafie for 1MDB query to Najib'**

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**By Vanesha Shurentheran**

**Tourism and Culture Minister Nazri Aziz says he is straightforward and doesn't need a 'junior minister' like Shafie to do his talking for him in cabinet meetings.**

PETALING JAYA: Umno leader Nazri Aziz has hit back at Shafie Apdal, calling the former minister a liar for claiming that he had praised him for raising questions on 1MDB at cabinet meetings.

"What he said was a lie," Nazri told FMT when contacted yesterday.

"If I felt that what he said about 1MDB was right, I would have said it out myself."

Shafie, who is now the president of Parti Warisan Sabah, had recently commented on Nazri's allegation that he and former deputy prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin were among the recipients of Prime Minister Najib Razak's controversial RM2.6 billion donation prior to the last general election (GE13) in 2013.

"I remember when I raised questions on 1MDB, Nazri was seated by my side. He put his thumbs up, but not to be seen.

"He said it was good that we asked such questions," Shafie told a press conference in Kimanis, Sabah on Tuesday.

Responding to this, Nazri said Shafie had gotten his story wrong.

"Actually, what happened during that meeting was, he (Shafie) had made a joke about me in the cabinet and the prime minister was laughing.

"So I told him, 'Shafie, look, he is laughing at your joke. The prime minister likes you. Why don't you just go and talk to him and tell him your concerns. There is no need to oppose him and fight with him.'"

Dismissing the idea that he had encouraged Shafie to raise questions on the RM2.6 billion, Nazri added that he was a "very straightforward person".

"If I disagree, I disagree. I don't need the support of a junior minister to do this for me. I am not a coward.

"I don't need a junior minister like Shafie to say that. It would be an insult to me," he told FMT.

Nazri, during a tell-all session with Umno Overseas Alumni Club members in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday, admitted to having received RM510,000 from Najib for GE13, which comprised RM10,000 as a nomination fee for election candidates, RM200,000 for election campaign expenses and RM300,000 to distribute to the 60 branches under his Padang Regas parliamentary constituency.

He said in Malaysia, it was not wrong to ask for funds from outside to support the running of election campaigns, as long as the money did not come from illegal activities, such as money laundering and bribes.

Yesterday, the tourism and culture minister also weighed in on the police decision last month to cancel a proposed debate between him and former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The proposal came about after Mahathir, who is PPBM chairman, challenged Nazri to debate on political and economic matters affecting the nation. He specifically cited topics like 1MDB, the Bumiputra Malaysia Finance (BMF) scandal and the RM2.6 billion deposited into Najib's bank account.

The debate was scheduled to be held in the hall of the Maktab Rendah Sains Mara (MRSM) in Kuala Kangsar on March 25.

However, on March 21, Perak police said they had rejected the application for a permit for the debate as the organisers submitted the application form late and because such an event was not allowed on school premises.

On Monday, Nazri hit out at the police over this, claiming the debate was disallowed because they had directed people to lodge reports against it.

He said a few people who had lodged reports against the event had told him that they were instructed by the police to do so.

"I got to know there were five police reports lodged against the debate by three people. The contents on the reports were identical," he had said.

Perak police however, denied the allegations.

"I stand by my statement," Nazri told FMT. "I read all the police reports, and they were all standardised. From that, my conclusion is that it was all planned."

Adding that the police would deny this, he said he would not question them any further as it was their call not to give the permit.

However, he said he was still perplexed as to why his permit for the debate with Mahathir was denied, while Mahathir's permit to have a rally on the same night was given.

He added that the Selangor police had also revoked a permit for the debate to be held at the Karangkrak Complex in Shah Alam on April 7.

“The debate at Karangkrak, they call it a ‘wacana’. Before that, they already had 45 wacanas, all very successful. But when they wanted to organise the wacana between me and Mahathir, the Shah Alam OCPD first gave approval, then retracted it.”

Police had claimed people staying nearby had protested against the debate.

He said police had never told him “the real reason” for disallowing the debate.

“That’s why I’m perplexed. I don’t understand. Am I a threat to the security in the country? It’s news to me if I am.”

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