

Warisan slams Nazri, praises Sarawak minister

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By Robin Augustin

I can't believe this is the man the government sends out to promote Malaysia to the world, says Warisan vice-president Junz Wong on tourism and culture minister.

KOTA KINABALU: Parti Warisan Sabah has come to the defence of Sarawak minister Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah in the wake of a federal minister's scathing attack against his fellow Barisan Nasional colleague over the Tourism Tax.

Yesterday, Tourism and Culture Minister Nazri Aziz lashed out at Karim for urging Putrajaya to defer the Tourism Tax, as such a law should not be implemented without having consulted the Sarawak government, in line with the spirit of the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63).

Nazri said there was no need for Karim to raise the MA63, adding that the tax was a federal tax, hence Sabah and Sarawak are bound by it too. He also criticised Karim, calling the latter "ignorant and inexperienced".

Karim, the Asajaya assemblyman, was recently promoted to a full minister's post in the Sarawak Cabinet, but is a senior figure in PBB – the lynchpin of Sarawak BN.

"You should not talk big in politics. If you want to show samseng (thuggery), we are bigger samseng," Nazri was quoted as saying, adding Karim should have come to see him first if "he didn't understand".

But Nazri's harsh words have not gone down well with Warisan vice-president Junz Wong, who sees Nazri's remarks as a "prime example" of Umno leaders' "arrogance and ignorance", especially when it came to matters pertaining to Sabah and Sarawak.

"For Sabah and Sarawak, our contention with the tax, aside from the fact that it's flawed in its mechanism, is that it was bulldozed through by the federal government without any thought or consideration on the impact to the state and its people," he told FMT.

"And this is not in line with the spirit of MA63 and speaks volumes of Putrajaya's hypocrisy when they say that they will honour the MA63."

Last November, during TV3's Soal Jawab programme, Prime Minister Najib Razak said Putrajaya was "entirely committed" to MA63.

Wong added that Karim was only voicing the concerns of Sarawakians and that this wouldn't have been necessary if Putrajaya had sought the views of the state governments, industry players and the public.

"I must take my hat off to Karim because despite being in the BN, he has spoken up for the people. On the other hand, the Sabah government says it needs to study the matter. What else is there to study? The Tourism Tax will come into effect on July 1.

"The Sabah government isn't even brave enough to state its stand."

Wong also hit out at Nazri for running the ministry like a "samseng" (thug), adding the Umno Supreme Council member was an "embarrassment".

"I can't believe this is the man the government sends out to promote Malaysia to the world."

The Likas assemblyman also said Nazri shouldn't try to downplay the impact of the tax in Sabah and Sarawak just because most five-star hotels are in Peninsular Malaysia.

"Not everyone is a BN or Umno minister who stays at five-star hotels. The tax even affects non-rated hotels and locals, who already have to pay the GST."

Wong said Nazri should come down from his ivory tower and pay a visit to hotels in the country to better understand the situation on the ground.

"Perhaps he might even notice that there is more than one hotel in Miri," said Wong, alluding to Nazri's remark that there was only one hotel in Miri, Sarawak, when commenting on the city's opposition to the tax.

Wong added that he was "thankful" that Nazri was in BN and Umno, saying his remarks would only benefit the opposition.

"You can see there are many Sarawakians who are upset with Nazri online. His remarks are being shared by many Sarawakians. With friends like these, Najib doesn't need enemies."

Tourism Tax illegal in Sabah?

Meanwhile, a Sabahan economist, Zainnal Ajamain has described the Tourism Tax as illegal in the state, as it would amount to double taxation on hotels and lodging houses.

Currently, all municipal councils in Sabah impose a fee of RM40 and RM140 per month per room based on occupancy rates.

In an article on Borneo Today, Zainnal said Putrajaya couldn't simply pass a law and take over the power of the Sabah government to impose tax over hotels and lodging houses in the state which came under the purview of the local government as stipulated under the Sabah Local Government Ordinance 1961 Section 49(46)(i).

He said the Tourism Tax was part of local government revenue which belonged to each municipality and that even the Sabah government – which the local government comes under – wouldn't touch this revenue which belonged “exclusively” to each municipality.

“When Parliament tables a Bill it is a Federal law and the MPs from Sabah do not represent the Sabah Legislative Assembly who make and pass laws for Sabah.

“Therefore, the approval that any Sabah MP may have given in the Dewan Rakyat is not binding to Sabah, unless consent is given by the Sabah Legislative Assembly.”

Zainnal said by that token, it would only be right for the Sabah Legislative Assembly to reject the Tourism Tax at their next sitting, regardless whether the motion to reject it came from the government or the opposition.

Following Nazri's criticism of Karim yesterday, social media users have hit out at Nazri, with some taking his attack on Karim as an attack on Sarawak.

Sarawak BN Youth chief Fadillah Yusof, who is also Works Minister in the federal government, condemned his Cabinet colleague's remarks, saying it wasn't in line with the BN spirit.

Tax per room per night

The Tourism Tax, once implemented, will see both locals and foreigners paying a levy to operators at all types of accommodation premises, which are registered with the government.

The tax rate is fixed and charged on a per-room, per-night basis.

The tax for non-rated hotels will be RM2.50, while the tax for two-star ones is RM5, three-star RM10, four-star RM15 and five-star RM20.

While debating the Tourism Tax Bill in the Dewan Rakyat in April, Nazri said revenue from the hotel tax would amount to RM654.62 million if there was a 60% overall occupancy rate of the 11 million “room nights” in the country.

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