

Stop the mud-slinging, MPs and Customs told

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SEREMBAN: Enough.

The country's top two leaders want Barisan Nasional backbenchers and the Customs and Excise Department to stop their slanging match.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said he feared that both sides would end up as losers if the mud-slinging continued.

"I think all these accusations and counter-accusations between them has come to a level where they have to be stopped.

"There may be negative reactions towards the Customs. Or there may also be some who may feel uneasy with our MPs," said Abdullah, who was on a one-day visit to Negri Sembilan.

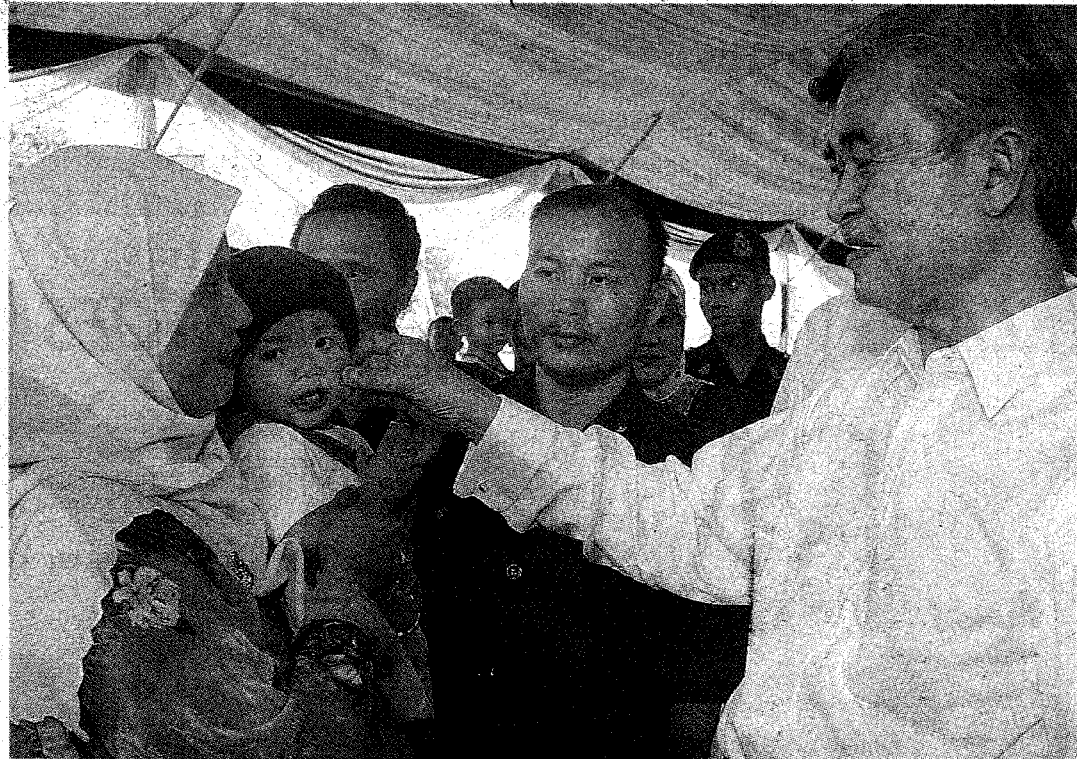
Over the past few months, Customs senior officers had come under attack in Parliament with some MPs accusing them of abusing their power or craving publicity. In turn, the Customs disclosed that Datuk Mohd Said Yusof (Jasin MP) asked them to close an eye in an investigation involving his company. Since then, the relationship had tanked.

On Monday, BN MPs accused the Customs of spending RM48 million on their uniforms, a tit-for-tat after it had revealed that Mohd Said sent a threatening SMS to a senior Customs official.

Abdullah said MPs had the freedom to speak in Parliament but they should use this privilege to discuss issues concerning the country's current affairs as well as future plans.

"Voicing their thoughts and concerns on various aspects, especially on development plans... now that is allowed, that is freedom."

But there were limits to what



Abdullah meets Haziaah Idris and her toddler son, Mohd Iqbal Iman Mohd Rashidi, at the renaming ceremony of the Paroi People's Housing Project. — NST picture by Owee Ah Chun

could and could not be spoken, especially when the subject matter concerned sensitive issues.

Abdullah said the people had high hopes on how MPs carried themselves and performed their duties in Parliament.

"They want their MPs to speak facts and deliver quality debate aimed at building the nation," he said after the renaming ceremony of the Paroi People's Housing Project here yesterday.

Meanwhile in Putrajaya, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said that MPs, though covered by Parliamentary privilege, should not put down government agencies.

Reacting to the Customs-MPs brouhaha in Parliament, the Barisan Nasional Chief Whip told MPs to conduct sessions "in a decorous manner".

"Flaws can be pointed out, but do it ethically in Parliament... I would like to see things done in a way that they don't appear to be belittling government departments... although they have a right to air their grievances... It is the manner of presenting it."

Asked to comment on the Jasin MP-Customs controversy following a report on Mohd Said's SMS to preventive director Adnan Ariffin, Najib said although it was a private exchange of SMS between

the duo, the matter could be referred to a Parliamentary Committee.

Najib also expressed regret that the SMS sent by the Jasin MP had been made public.

The SMS, written in Malay, translates as: "Peace be upon you, Haji. You want to invite me to meet up. Romainor in Malacca is continuously finding fault with my company. If this continues, don't be angry if I continue to raise Customs issues. Thank you."

Romainor Sharif is the Malacca Customs preventive chief who refused Mohd Said's request to close one eye in an investigation over a consignment of timber.