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Cabinet to discuss alleged misuse of tsunami fund

At the Dewan Rakyat

Reports by ZULKIFLI ABD RAHMAN, FLORENCE A. SAMY AND ELIZABETH LOOI

DATUK Seri Nazri Aziz said he will raise the issue regarding the alleged misuse of the Special Fund for tsunami aid at the next Cabinet meeting. Referring to the matter, which was stated in the Auditor-General's Report 2005 tabled in Parliament last week, the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department said it should not be ignored. "I will raise the matter at the next Cabinet meeting," he told reporters at the Parliament lobby.

"This is the first time I'm hearing about the misuse of the fund. The Government would not have known about it, if not for the Auditor-General's Report." Earlier, Nazri told the House that the fund should only be for the tsunami disaster "and nothing else".

Replying to a supplementary question by Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail (Keadilan – Permatang Pauh) he said the fund was also used to help fishermen whose boats were damaged in the calamity. "But the fishermen would have to make a police report before applying for the fund," he said.

He said that the Government was still studying the long-term assistance that could be given to tsunami victims. He said a total of RM78.95mil was collected from the public and, as of May 31 last year, RM51.39mil had been spent while a further RM20mil was used to build houses for the victims in Kota Kuala Muda in Langkawi and Penang.

Quoting the Auditor-General's Report, Dr Wan Azizah said a total of RM9.84mil to be used to buy fishing nets, outboard motors and boats was misused by the Kedah government. "Of this amount, the State Development Office used RM701,222 to buy caps, shirts and lapel pins and erect billboards to welcome the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister during their visit to the state last year," she alleged.

“A total of RM6.7mil was not returned to the Federal Government by the end of last year and RM9.83mil was also spent to build houses that were of low quality.”

Later at another press conference, Public Accounts Committee chairman Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad said the committee would investigate the issue. “We will visit the sites and look at the houses,” he said.