

13/08/1998

`Allow ITM to set up medical faculty'

reports on "Dewan Negara" by Ramlan Said; Hayati Hayatudin INSTITUT Teknologi Mara should be allowed to set up a medical faculty to help produce more doctors to alleviate the shortage faced in the country.

In proposing this, Senator Datuk Ibrahim Ali asked why this had not been done though a working paper had been submitted to the authorities.

Debating the Supplementary Supply Bill 1998, he said the country needed more doctors, especially among the Malays. A medical faculty at ITM could overcome this problem.

The Bill was later passed after a debate involving 18 senators. Ibrahim also hit out at the Research Assessment Committee under the Ministry of Health, saying there were complaints that applications for grants from ministry officials and other individuals had been rejected.

As the rejected applications involved those submitted mainly by Malay officials, questions had been raised whether the committee had acted fairly as the majority of its members were non-Malays.

The committee is chaired by the Health Ministry deputy director-general (Research and Technical Support) Datuk Dr M. Jegathesan, with another 14 members.

Ibrahim also suggested that a laboratory be set up under the jurisdiction of Pusat Islam to carry out halal tests on food and other items used by Muslims.

"Scientific analysis is required. The system where the halal certificate is issued following visits by officials to factories is no longer sufficient."

The mass media, especially the New Straits Times, won praise from Ibrahim for daily coverage of the proceedings in the House.

He said the reports, which showed active participation of senators in debating and raising issues, proved that they were not only warming their seats and the House was not merely a rubber stamp, as alleged by Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang.

On the economy, Ibrahim said rumours of the purported rift between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim were churned out to create instability.

That was why, he added, Anwar's pledge of loyalty to Dr Mahathir in Penang yesterday was significant as it would help strengthen the economy.

He agreed with Senator Datuk Hashim Safin that this was not the first time Anwar had pledged publicly his support for Dr Mahathir.

Earlier, Senator Datuk Abdul Aziz Abdul Rahman referred the downgrading the rating of Malaysia by international rating agencies. These agencies always spoke of transparency but this was not reflected in their action.

"They are based far away from Malaysia...they at least should try and get alternative views."

He proposed that a fair and unbiased rating agency be established, perhaps under the International Monetary Fund.

He also spoke on last Friday's rumours, circulated through the Internet of disturbances reportedly in the Chow Kit area.

Abdul Aziz said the rumours should be countered immediately. The Ministry of Information should have aired footages of the calm in Chow Kit that night itself and not wait until the next day to do so.

Senator Yim Chee Chong praised the Government for its ability to provide funds despite the economic downturn.

Touching on the customs, immigration and quarantine checkpoint row with

Singapore, Yim advised the republic to learn to respect its neighbours.

He "thanked" the republic for starting the dispute as it had consolidated support from all quarters in the country for the Government.

Senator Khadijah Awang urged the Government to eradicate abuse of power by its agencies and departments.

Senator Abdillah Abdul Rahim spoke on efforts to turn the country into a centre of excellence in education.

However, he expressed fears that this could result in lecturers in public institutions of higher learning leaving for the private sector, besides poor students being deprived of tertiary education due to high fees.

He suggested that while efforts were made to upgrade education, emphasis should be placed on creating "niche" universities specialising in certain areas, like Harvard which was well known for its MBA courses.

Senator Tee Thiong Hock felt a lack of focus had contributed to the situation where agriculture and food production had been given low priority by many.

He said food production could be enhanced firstly, by increasing the land under cultivation, and by increasing productivity.

"The Tanjung Karang padi area in Selangor has shown that a high yield can be achieved. What's needed now is for other padi-planting areas to emulate it."

Senator Datuk Zainudin Maidin said Malaysians today were so caught up in the corporate world that they had forgotten about agriculture.

"Take for example the Wakil Rakyat...do they still meet the farmers and get to know them? These days they are busy politicking!"

Zainudin told a story about a chili farmer in Mehrang who was able to earn RM1,000 a month.

"For somebody in Mehrang, this is a lot of money," he said, adding that he did not understand why marketing was supposedly the problem.

"When I visit supermarkets like Carrefour, Giant Hypermarket and Makro, there seems to be no problem in marketing."

Also taking part in the debate was Senator Datuk Ghazi Ramli who suggested research and think-tank bodies conduct analysis on the country's economic problems.

"Those like the Institute of Strategic and International Studies and the Malaysian Institute of Economic Research should carry out research locally and abroad.

"The findings can be used by us and other regional neighbours to better comprehend the situation.

"So when the next economic slowdown takes place, say in the next 10 years, we can look back at this time, remember and know how to handle it.

"The experiences now will be most valuable to us later," Ghazi said.

He also highlighted the issue of banks giving out loans for schemes such as the Fund for Food.

"Banks do not make it easy and they slow the process down. What they should do is think of ways to maximise the funds."

Winding up the points raised, Finance Ministry parliamentary secretary Datuk Dr Shafie Salleh agreed that the mental outlook of farmers had to change.

He also concurred that the media had an important role to play in promoting the agriculture industry.

(END)