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Parliament-Debate

KARPAL'S EXPLANATION ERUPTS INTO SLANGING MATCH

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 2 (Bernama) -- A heated verbal exchange between the member for Jelutong-cum-lawyer Karpal Singh and government backbenchers erupted at the Dewan Rakyat today as the House was debating next year's Budget.

It occurred when Karpal was explaining to the House his reasons for defending former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in Anwar's current sodomy trial in the High Court.

Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail called for order when the slanging match threatened to go out of control with Karpal and the government back-benchers challenging each other.

The incident started when Datuk Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis (BN-Rompin), who was debating the 2000 Supply Bill, read out to the House, a page one report in today's Utusan Malaysia newspaper headlined "Aduan siasat Karpal" (complaint calls for probe against Karpal).

Karpal then rose alleging that the complaint was baseless and that the group lodging the complaint was an illegal one. Karpal also asked the police to investigate the group mentioned in the news report.

"None of my actions is against the law," Karpal said referring to his defence of Anwar in the sodomy case.

Even before Karpal could finish speaking Wan Hanafiah Wan Mat Saman (BN-Pokok Sena) stood and read out parts of the parliamentary hansard dated Dec 18 1997 which mentioned Karpal questioning the government for not acting against Anwar for alleged sexual misconduct.

"He'd asked us (the government) to take action. When we've taken action he now turns to defend him (Anwar)," said Wan Hanafiah.

Seeing no end in sight to the verbal exchange between Karpal, Wan Hanafiah, Noh Omar (BN-Tanjong Karang) and Jamaluddin, the Speaker then interrupted and asked them to let the Bar Council handle the matter.

The Utusan Malaysia report mentioned about a group calling itself the people's action group against Karpal Singh lodging a formal complaint and demanding the Bar Council to investigate Karpal in the interest of preserving the sanctity of the country's laws.

The group reportedly comprised 71 lawyers, corporate leaders, representatives of non-governmental organisations and individuals.

The group listed down, what it claimed as several proofs of Karpal's public statements about Anwar's alleged sexual misconduct and that yet the lawyer chose to be Anwar's defence counsel.

Earlier, Noh rose to ask Karpal why did he not take up the case for Ummi Hafilda and Azizah Abu Bakar who met him much earlier and whether he chose to take up Anwar's case because Anwar was a former deputy prime minister.

(Ummi and Azizah were the prosecution's key witness in Anwar's earlier corruption trial. Anwar was subsequently convicted on four counts of corrupt practice and jailed six years).

At this juncture, the Speaker firmly reminded the member concerned to just let the matter at hand be dealt with by the Bar Council.

"There's no need to bring this matter to the House," Mohamed Zahir said.

When his turn came to debate the bill, Karpal took the opportunity to rebut allegations made by government back-benchers against him, sparking yet another round of slanging match.

Karpal did not make way for government back-benchers who rose to seek clarification from him except for parliamentary opposition leader Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Tajong) who was seated next to him.

By this time, the Deputy Speaker Datuk Ong Tee Keat was presiding over the sitting and heard a volley of unparliamentary words such as "bodoh", "baghal" (stupid), bai (singh), "kerbau" (buffalo), and "otak kecil" (pea-brained) being exchanged.

Ong appealed to the members to remain calm and refrain from using words which may offend other MPs in the House.

Karpal, who proceeded with the debate, also spoke about Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's willingness to testify in Anwar's current trial only to give statement relating to the sodomy charge.

"The prime minister's attitude is unbecoming. I worry that other witnesses may also set such condition," Karpal said.

Ong then reprimanded Karpal and asked the member not to make assumptions.

To this Karpal replied: "I hope the prime minister will come."

"It's better for me to see him in court," Karpal said ending his speech.

Also debating the bill, Datuk Ruhanie Ahmad (BN-Parit Sulong) proposed that the government carry out a programme to improve and sustain Bumiputera students' mastery of mathematics, additional mathematics, physics, chemistry and diology after they have sat for the SPM examination.

He said such a salvage programme was crucial for their enlarged enrolment into science and technology courses in public universities as envisaged by the government.

"Their mastery of these subjects would have to be improved first before streaming them for university-level science and technology courses.

"Otherwise they'll be left stragglng behind their non-Bumiputera peers," he said.

Ruhanie said while the government had been spending millions of ringgit to rehabilitate young drug addicts, it should also be willing to invest in the proposed programme to salvage Bumiputera students.

Husni Hanadzlah (BN-Tambun), in supporting the bill, said if the growing tendency of some Malays to subscribe to extremism was left unchecked, Muslims in the country would be weakened.

The brand of extremism which the opposition party PAS was trying to expound would only divide the Malays even over trivial issues, he said.

The House sits again tomorrow.

-- BERNAMA

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