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Opposition questions legality of House sitting

THE first meeting of the 10th Parliament began with the Opposition MPs challenging the legality of yesterday's sitting, claiming it was illegal and unconstitutional.

For an hour, MPs from Pas and DAP and the backbenchers were in a slanging match on whether a caretaker Government had the powers to advise the Yang di-Pertuan Agong on the convening of Parliament.

Even the appointment of Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail was delayed when the Opposition argued that it had not been carried out according to procedure, claiming they had not been given the opportunity to submit their candidates for the post.

With almost every one wanting to make their voices heard and shouts of "sit down", "enoughlah" and "baliklah" resounding in the House, it was a scene of almost total bedlam.

As soon as proceedings started, Opposition leader Datuk Fadzil Mohd Nor (Pas-Pendang) stood up apparently to protest.

But he sat down when Parliament secretary Datuk Mohd Salleh Hassan informed the House that the proceedings would commence with the doa.

After the doa, Mohd Salleh read the proclamation by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong on yesterday's meeting and when he finished doing so, Fadzil stood up, claiming the sitting should not be continued as regulations relating to convening of Parliament had not been observed.

He argued that the meeting was illegal and unconstitutional as it was called before the new Government was formed.

"Under Section 40 of the Constitution, this meeting is not valid ... it should therefore be postponed," he said.

Mohd Salleh said MPs could not address the House yet as they had not been sworn in, but this was ignored by the Opposition members.

Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP-Kepong) interjected, saying it was important that the question on the legality of the meeting was addressed.

He was soon joined by other Opposition MPs.

Waving the Standing Order handbook in the air, they questioned how the King could have been advised to call for the Parliament sitting when the new Cabinet had not been formed.

The situation calmed down a little when Mohamad Sabu (Pas-Kuala Kedah) suggested that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad provide some explanation on the matter.

Dr Mahathir said that as the head of the caretaker Government, he had the right to advise the King on when the Parliament should meet, but it did not go down well with the Opposition bench.

Mohamad Sabu and Dr Tan tried to speak again but were cut off by Mohd Salleh who told the MPs that they could not speak as they had yet to be sworn in.

"I would like to go on with the day's proceedings," he said but his appeal fell on deaf ears as a few Opposition MPs jumped from their seats to speak up.

At a loss on what to do as the Dewan Rakyat Speaker had not been appointed yet, Mohd Salleh desperately tried to bring order to the House when he invited Dr Mahathir to move the motion on the appointment of the Speaker.

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