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Proposal to restrict Harakah hotly debated with reaction mixed

HARAKAH, Pas' official organ whose illegal sale and distribution has forced the Government into taking action, was fiercely debated in the Dewan Negara yesterday.

While many of the senators were in favour of the Government's move to restrict it from being sold to non-Pas members, a few expressed objections.

Senator Datuk Zainuddin Maidin said the distribution of Harakah should not be restricted as it was just a "gossip paper", therefore it would be gradually rejected by the people.

He said educated people were "not afraid" to read the newspaper as they knew it was full of gossip.

Just like some gossip magazines, Harakah attracted readers, especially Malays, who liked to read and listen to gossip, he said.

He gave a number of what he called unsubstantiated reports in the Harakah such as the "cracked" Twin Towers, the murder of a Pas member by "Umno people", and the superimposed photograph to show a big crowd during Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's visit to Perlis.

"These are all lies, so let them (continue with such reports). Why are we afraid of lies?" Zainuddin said.

He said he was not saying that newspapers such as the New Straits Times and Utusan Melayu were not biased, but they did not tell lies.

Senator Datuk Abdul Aziz Abdul Rahman urged the Government to take stern action against Harakah as it contained incorrect and misleading information on the Government which was intentionally done to smear the image of the leaders.

He said despite the fact that the publication was only meant for party members, Harakah was sold in the streets.

"It is time that the Government take stern action against it. I laud the move to confiscate Harakah as it has totally disregarded the rules," Abdul Aziz said when debating the Supplementary Supply (1999)(No.2) Bill 1999.

He said the Government should ensure that Harakah would only be sold to its party members at Pas headquarters or offices or distributed through the post, and not sold through retail stores.

"Harakah played a role in giving a misleading perception about the Government, and is full of lies and slander.

"It sowed hatred against the Government," he said, adding that this could be detrimental to the people.

Abdul Aziz said the Government should take the initiative to distribute the mainstream newspapers to the various Malaysian embassies and offices, and to universities abroad which have Malaysian students.

"From my many visits abroad, I feel that there is not enough information on what is happening in the country.

"During my recent visit to Cairo, I found that the students there rely on Harakah to know what is happening in the country."

At this juncture, Senator Jamilah Ibrahim, who is Pas Wanita chief, stood up to argue that the people now could get a free-flow of information through the Internet.

"Even if the Government stops the people from reading Harakah, they can still read it through the Internet," she added.

Abdul Aziz said if this was so, then Pas should stop selling Harakah to the general public and confine Harakah to its members as the people could

read Harakah through the Internet if they wanted to.
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