

27 DEC 1999
Senate-Debate
SENATORS CALL FOR FIRM ACTION AGAINST HAKAKAH

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 27 (Bernama) -- Several Senators today pressed for stern action against Harakah, the limited-circulation official organ of the opposition party, PAS, citing that it is inclined to print defamatory misinformation.

They raised this when debating the Supplementary Supply (1999) (No.2) Bill 1999 at the first sitting of the Dewan Negara following last month's general election for the country's 10th Parliament.

In demanding such action, Senator Datuk Abdul Aziz Abdul Rahman also urged the authorities to reprimand the tabloid's publisher for ignoring a Home Ministry directive that Harakah be circulated among PAS members only.

"Harakah is now widely sold and easily available at sundry shops," Abdul Aziz said,

Senator Datuk Zainuddin Maidin said he fully concurred with Abdul Aziz's call but reckoned that there was no need to ban Harakah and it would suffice to confine its circulation to party members only.

"As a democracy, we should not ban Harakah and being educated citizens, we should not be averse to reading Harakah," said Zainuddin.

Zainuddin said the people themselves would eventually shy away from reading Harakah if the tabloid kept printing lies and serving only as a gossip-monger.

"Lies and misinformation about cracks developing at the Kuala Lumpur Tower (a city landmark and communications tower) and Harakah's pictorial story about two Mahathirs (Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) in one photograph only makes the tabloid nothing more than an entertainment magazine," he said.

PAS women's wing chief Senator Jamilah Ibrahim, who rose to seek clarification, told the House that the party leadership did not condone street sale of Harakah to non-PAS members.

"But humans being humans, the tendency is to do the don'ts. We the publisher of Harakah are not at fault. The culprits are the vendors and the street-corner stalls which took advantage and ignored sales ethics. By all means act against the culprits, not against us," said Jamilah.

Zainuddin then carried on saying he was happy that Jamilah made that point as this meant that the PAS leadership had endorsed the government's recent seizures of copies of Harakah from news-stands.

Zainuddin, while citing today's front-page report in a local established broadsheet newspaper, also expressed concern over the spread of the western craze to usher in the new millennium among Malaysian teenagers.

"They braved the sun and were willing to stand in line as early as 4 am to get free tickets for a so-called coolest party to usher in the new year," he said.

According to him, culture-wise this was very un-Malaysian and smacked of attempts by certain quarters to pollute the minds of young Malaysians.

"It's not that we can't party and celebrate the new year but let it suit our own national image," he said.

Also debating the bill, Senator Zainal Rampak urged the government to urgently tackle prices of essential items which he said were spiralling.

He said that even before government employees could receive their 10 per cent salary increments as from Jan 1 year 2000 as announced in the 2000 Budget, prices of goods had already shot up.

"Are we supposed to give a blind eye to this. Who will fight for their

lot?," said Zainal, who is also president of the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC).

The MTUC, Fomca (the federation of consumers associations) and Cuepacs, the largest public sector employees union, had repeatedly gone to the ground as "eyes and ears of the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry, to check public complaints of rising chicken, he said.

Zainal said by doing so it was never their intention to blow the issue out of proportion and create panic among consumers.

Also speaking on essential items, Senator Datuk Karim Ghani, who was sworn in earlier in the morning, urged the authorities to list down and publicise the names of traders who maintain reasonable prices against that of known profiteers who over-priced essential items.

"This is akin to advertising for such shops in a special promotion so that consumers know where they can obtain cheaper items," he said.

This way the government would indirectly help both consumers and traders as well as bring down retail prices, he added.

The Senate's two-day sitting ends tomorrow.

-- BERNAMA

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