

27 OCT 2000

Budget-Uproar

UPROAR OVER SPECIAL PAYMENT FOR TERENGGANU DISRUPTS BUDGET SPEECH

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 27 (Bernama) -- The mere mention of "special payment" led to a 10-minute uproar among PAS Members of Parliament which disrupted Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin's 2001 Budget speech today.

Shouts of "lies" and "royalties" came from the PAS MPs.

Despite Tun Daim mentioning that the Federal government has agreed to continue channelling the special payment to the Terengganu state government, opposition MPs, led by Mahfuz Omar (PAS-Pokok Sena) and Dr Syed Azman Syed Ahmad Nawawi (PAS-Kuala Terengganu), continued to disrupt his speech.

Tun Daim mentioned "special payment" a total of five times and each time this was met by shouts of "lies, lies, lies" from the opposition.

The opposition seemed to want the term "oil royalties" to be used instead.

Wading into the row, government backbenchers ticked off members from the opposition for the disruption and they also thumped the table in a show of support for the Finance Minister.

Throughout the commotion, which began some 40 minutes into Tun Daim's speech, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi both appeared nonplussed and occasionally breaking into a smile.

Tun Daim said the special payment will be used to assist the aged, single mothers, the disabled and orphans as well as for entrepreneur development through programmes such as Tekun-Terengganu and Prosper-Terengganu.

He said state civil servants in Terengganu need not worry as the special payment will also be used to pay their salaries.

It was at this juncture that the uproar started.

Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail, in trying to maintain order, reminded the opposition that using the term "lies" was inappropriate and that he would not want to order the opposition members out of the august house.

Tun Daim said Petronas, the national oil corporation, had in fact signed similar agreements with all state governments except with Sabah and Sarawak where the agreements signed were slightly varied.

"What is clear is that neither Terengganu nor other states in the peninsula are entitled to oil royalties. Any payment made by Petronas is a form of special payment as determined by the late Tun Abdul Razak (former prime minister)," he said.

Tun Daim said those who objected to the special payment can take the matter to court.

Just after the uproar, Tun Daim coincidentally said the government took cognizance of the need to care for mental patients, especially in view of the increase in amok incidents.

This again had the opposition members up in arms while government backbenchers could not help but laugh.

Tun Daim said the government will build two psychiatry hospitals, one in Kedah and the other in Johor, while the Hospital Bahagia Tanjung Rambutan will be expanded.

-- BERNAMA

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