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Parliament-Winding Up (Finance)

OPPOSITION TAKEN TO TASK FOR CRITICISMS DURING DEBATE

KUALA LUMPUR, April 9 (Bernama) -- Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Dr Shafie Mohd Salleh today expressed disappointment at the attitude of some members of Parliament who frequently found fault with government plans.

While admitting that the government was duty bound to answer every question that was raised in Parliament, he said when the questions are weighed, it usually showed that the opposition picked on the same matters.

"The opposition has no suggestions, apart from repeating malicious statements just to fill up the time allocated for debate. It would be better if the opposition can offer some suggestion and alternative opinion.

"The suggestion can than be debated. A debate in Parliament would be more meaningful," he said when winding up the debate on the Third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP3) for the Finance ministry at the Dewan Rakyat here today.

Referring to the opposition's move to halt the tabling of Budget 2001 in the last Dewan Rakyat session and OPP3 by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last week, Shafie said the government had to be firm with the opposition which was bent on discrediting its sincere initiatives.

The summing up remarks by Shafie drew the attention of two opposition members of Parliament, Abdul Rahman Yusof (Keadilan-Kemaman) and Datuk Kamaruddin Jaafar (PAS-Tumpat) who stood up to ask for further explanation.

Abdul Rahman said Shafie's remarks were irresponsible as the opposition merely raised criticism against the implementation of projects which were a waste of public funds.

Kamaruddin asked if Shafie's remarks had anything to do with the rating done by Standards and Poor which had downgraded Malaysia.

Shafie in his reply said, "Criticisms by outsiders have an ulterior motive. Yang Berhormat (Tumpat) please don't be a yes man."

The deputy finance minister in his winding up speech touched on the volatility of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange, the government's purchase of Malaysia Airlines, the use of public funds to acquire Time dotCom Berhad shares and the ringgit's peg against the US dollar.

On the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange, Shafie said share prices came under severe selling pressure prompted by the slide in worldwide markets, the hike in US interest rates and the performance of the US economy.

Shafie said the local bourse dipped 1.53 per cent compared with Hong Kong which came off 16.6 per cent, Singapore 10.9 per cent, Indonesia 10.7 per cent, the Philippines 4.2 per cent and Japan 4.1 per cent while Taiwan, Thailand and South Korea registered gains.

At this point, Abdul Rahman stood up and said that the explanation given by Shafie was too general and prompted the opposition to repeatedly raise the same questions.

Shafie's winding up session was also interrupted by a few other members of Parliament like Mahfuz Omar (PAS-Pokok Sena), Raja Datuk Ahmad Zainuddin Raja Omar (BN-Larut), Husam Musa (PAS-Kubang Kerian), Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP-Kepong) and Kerk Kim Hock (DAP-Kota Melaka).

He was then explaining that the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) bought the Time dotCom shares for long-term investment.

Mohamad Sabu (PAS-Kuala Kedah) then stood up and said that a better explanation should be forthcoming.

"The explanation does not suffice. The EPF does not know about the

fluctuations of a stock market?, I know. There are many corporate figures sitting at the back listening, this is embarrassing," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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