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## Opposition fails in bid to stop tabling of OPP

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THE Third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP) took centre stage in the Dewan Rakyat this week, starting with a failed attempt by the Opposition on Tuesday to defer its tabling by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Led by Opposition leader Datuk Fadzil Noor (Pas-Pendang), they said more time was needed to study the plan and obtain feedback.

The tabling should have been done next week as the plan was distributed to MPs just a day earlier, they argued.

Deputy Speaker Datuk Lim Si Cheng denied the request, saying there was no provision requiring the plan to be distributed early.

Lim's ruling did not go down well with the Opposition who took turns to prevent Dr Mahathir from starting his speech.

One after another, their MPs stood to protest, including Kerk Kim Hock (DAP-Kota Melaka), Datuk Dr Hassan Ali (Pas-Parit Buntar), Mahfuz Omar (Pas-Pokok Sena), Mohamad Sabu (Pas-Kuala Kedah), Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP-Kepong) and Fong Po Kuan (DAP-Batu Gajah).

The commotion, with shouts of duduk and diam traded between the Opposition and the backbenchers, lasted for 10 minutes, the whole episode telecast live by RTM.

Sensing that the situation would spin out of control, Lim put his foot down and warned vocal MPs they would be evicted if they didn't obey his ruling.

The Pas and DAP members finally ran out of steam and Dr Mahathir resumed his speech, which lasted 90 minutes.

The Opposition had, it seemed, already planned on disrupting the OPP3 tabling. Their MPs held a meeting on Monday to discuss the "options" and were tight-lipped when reporters enquired about it.

"Just wait and see ... but make sure you are inside the House if you do not want to miss the excitement," one of them said, fuelling speculation that a walkout was on the cards.

Expecting a drama to unfold - many remember the ruckus created by the Opposition during the tabling of the 2001 Budget last year - all seats at the Press gallery were taken up.

The walkout did not materialise, though.

Perhaps, the Opposition realised it would do them more harm than good and that a walkout or boycott would backfire and lend credence to the notion that the Opposition was only good at creating trouble.

Ironically, though the Opposition argued that they were not given sufficient time to study the plan, their MPs were among the first to take part in the debate.

Abdul Rahman Yusof (Keadilan-Kemaman) spent more than 40 minutes delivering his speech.

Dr Tan spent a longer time. In fact, he was the first to speak when the plan was opened for debate.

When his turn came, the Chair allowed Fadzil 45 minutes with his speech, with similar allowance given to Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail (Keadilan-Permatang Pauh).

(MPs were given 30 minutes to speak on the first day of debate of the OPP3. It was later reduced to 20 minutes, and then 15 due to the large number of MPs wishing to take part.)

However, it was regrettable that most of the speeches by the Opposition

MPs were full of criticism of the Government, although Dr Tan did highlight some of the plan's salient points.

The backbenchers' performance was also not without flaws as some just repeated the information presented in the plan.

The Government also extended the sitting on Thursday till 7pm to allow MPs a chance to speak on the plan.

Kerk, who had earlier proposed for the extension, must have been surprised when the Government complied with his request.

Usually, motions to extend the sitting hours are moved by the Government.

On Monday, the House was extended until 8pm to enable Ministries to respond to points raised by MPs debating the Royal address.

This had to be done as the next day had been aside for the tabling of the OPP3.

While some Ministries rushed with their response, the National Unity and Social Development Ministry ought to be commended for its comprehensive reply, especially on issues related to the Kampung Medan clashes.

Parliamentary Secretary Datuk S. Veerasingam explained in full about the incident, tracing the events which led to the clashes that left six dead.

Although badgered by the Opposition, he not only rebutted their arguments but spiced his answers with advice.

He told the MPs of their role in preventing another Kampung Medan.

"When you talk at ceramah, avoid twisting facts which can create animosity among the people or hatred against the Government. When people are unhappy, whenever there is a misunderstanding, it can easily turn into clashes."

He said unhappiness was the cause of the clashes and it was not racial in nature as rumoured.

Veerasingam should also be commended for his willingness to make way for MPs seeking clarification, be it from the Opposition or backbenchers.

Perhaps, his experience as a State Executive Councillor in Perak before assuming his current post gave him the confidence.

It is no secret that replying to supplementary questions and clarification posed the biggest challenge to Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries.

Responding to the original questions will be a breeze as answers have been prepared.

The real test is when a supplementary question comes up. One has to rely on his knowledge and understanding of the subject.

There have been cases when MPs were politely told that the answers to their queries would be communicated in writing later.

Talking about making way, asking for the right to speak from those holding the floor speaks volume of one's persuasive skill, as demonstrated by Datuk Mohd Ali Hassan (BN-Tebrau).

Debating the OPP3, Keadilan member Abdul Rahman was engrossed in his criticism of the Government and refused to give way to the backbenchers.

But an undeterred Mohd Ali, seeing that he had something in common with Abdul Rahman, pleaded: "Sama-sama tak ada rambut, kasilah." (Both of us are bald, surely you can accommodate my request.)

Abdul Rahman sportingly gave way as the House roared in laughter.

Education Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Datuk Mahadzir Khir was not so lucky in his attempt to seek clarification from Fadzil.

The Opposition leader suggested that since he was fond of asking for clarification, he should become a backbencher.

For Datuk Shahnon Ahmad (Pas-Sik), making way apparently does not exist in his vocabulary.

Datuk Mohamad Aziz (BN-Sri Gading) repeatedly tried to intervene during

Shannon's speech but the Pas MP refused to budge.