

29/06/2002

MPs still reeling from Fadzil's death, PM's shock announcement

A SOMBRE atmosphere pervaded Parliament on Monday following the death of Opposition leader and Pendang MP Datuk Fadzil Noor.

Many were shocked over the demise of the Pas president as he was reported to be in stable condition after undergoing a coronary by-pass operation on June 10.

But his condition took a turn for the worse and he died on Sunday morning.

Speaker Tun Mohd Zahir Ismail opened Monday's proceedings by asking all Muslims present in the House to recite the Al-Fatihah while the non-Muslims observed a moment of silence as a sign of respect.

Barisan Nasional MPs were also not in high spirits either.

There were gloomy faces among the ranks following Sunday's announcement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that he was resigning as Umno president and BN chairman.

Although it had been retracted, many were still recovering from the Prime Minister's bombshell dropped at the end of his winding-up speech during the Umno general assembly.

In the lobby, Dr Mahathir's resignation and retraction was the main topic of discussion among MPs and journalists.

On Tuesday, everyone waited with bated breath for the Press conference by Deputy Prime Minister and Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on Dr Mahathir's resignation.

MPs crowded round the television set in the lounge for the Press conference which was telecast live from Putra World Trade Centre.

But some had to give the announcement a miss as they were needed in the House which was still in session.

Many later expressed relief upon knowing that Dr Mahathir would be vacating his post only in October next year, saying they expected the power transition to be smooth.

The Opposition scoffed at the news. "It is just another sandiwara (staged-play) by the BN," said one MP.

The atmosphere in the House, especially among the backbenchers, brightened on Wednesday with Mahfuz Omar (Pas-Pokok Sena) taking a shot at Umno MPs over the resignation episode.

Wan Nik Wan Yusoff (Pas-Bachok) added another twist to the matter. His contention that the country now had two prime ministers did not go down well with BN members, with Mastika Junaidah Husin (BN-Arau) the first on her feet rebutting the claim.

When Datuk Seri Hadi Awang (Pas-Marang) took the floor, it was the turn of the BN to taunt the Opposition.

Datuk Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis (BN-Rompin) stood up for clarification and nonchalantly addressed the MP, who is also Terengganu Menteri Besar, as Opposition leader.

Hadi did not take the bait. Side-stepping Jamaluddin's query, he continued with the speech.

But it was Hadi who would assume Fadzil's post, a decision made by Pas central committee on Monday night.

Kuala Kedah MP Mohamad Sabu said the party made the appointment according to tradition.

Some quarters opined that as a Menteri Besar, Hadi was expected to decline the appointment as he would not be able to spend much time in

Parliament.

Dungun MP and State Exco Datuk Mustafa Ali was then tipped as the likely candidate but Mohamad ruled it out.

"The Opposition leader has always been the head of the party with the highest number of seats in the House. So it has to be Hadi as he is Pas acting president."

The party has submitted Hadi's name to the Speaker but until Thursday, there was still no official announcement.

Pas' choice has been endorsed by the DAP, the second largest Opposition party in the Dewan Rakyat.

Its acting secretary-general and Bukit Mertajam member Chong Eng said that by convention, the Opposition leader should come from the Opposition party with the most number of representatives in the House.

Talking about numbers, Datuk Hassan Ali (Pas-Parit Buntar) stole the limelight from four women MPs debating allocations for women's service centres under the Women and Family Development Ministry.

Known for his lengthy and pompous speeches, he only stopped after the Chair reminded him that his time was up but not before getting Minister Datuk Shahrizat Jalil all worked up with his comments.

Shahrizat got even when replying, deriding the Parit Buntar MP for looking down on women who love cooking and learning flower arrangement.

Hassan had earlier reminded the ministry that the centres, set up to help women in need, might end up as places for those wanting to learn cooking or flower arrangements.

Another MP feeling hot under the collar was Husam Musa (Pas-Kubang Kerian) who took offence to a remark by Datuk Dr Yusof Jacob (BN-Sipitang) on Monday that members of the Opposition sometimes behaved like children or monkeys.

Husam's protest and repeated demands for Dr Yusof to retract his remark disrupted proceedings for a few minutes.

He only relented after Deputy Speaker Datuk Lim Si Cheng said the Hansard would be checked to find out if the Sipitang MP had directed the word at anyone specifically.

Husam raised the matter again on Thursday when everyone thought the episode was already forgotten. Armed with Monday's Hansard which showed that Dr Yusof did label Opposition MPs as monkeys, Husam called for a ruling.

But Lim said since Dr Yusof was not in the House, he felt it was improper to pass any ruling on the matter.

The House was adjourned sine die on Thursday after sitting for eight days. It will sit again in September.

(END)