

12 MAR 2003

Parliament-SAR

ISSUE ON SAR DRAWS HEATED DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT

KUALA LUMPUR, March 12 (Bernama) -- Opposition leader Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang was embroiled in a heated debate with backbenchers on the issue over Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) at the Dewan Rakyat today.

The debate turned intense when Mahfuz Omar (PAS-Pokok Sena) interrupted Abdul Hadi during the debate by stating that Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Putra Jamalullail "was also involved" with Barisan Nasional (BN) leaders in the issue over SAR which was said to have deviated.

Mahfuz claimed that BN leaders had dragged the Yang di-Pertuan Agong by bringing up the issue of deviations by SAR which had frequently been stated by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"The royal address by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong was written by BN leaders because the matter (SAR) has not been endorsed by the Rulers Council," he said.

During the debate, Abdul Hadi said His Majesty's royal address which had stated that the government did not want to assist Islamic religious schools that were found to have deviated was a serious allegation and must be debated.

Deputy Defence Minister Datuk Mohd Shafie Apdal then interrupted to express his dissatisfaction on behalf of the government.

"What was being claimed had belittled His Majesty," he said.

This drew the protest of several opposition members who said that he should not have interrupted or sought clarification because it was the Opposition Leader's turn to speak.

The repeated warnings by Deputy Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat Datuk Lim Si Cheng were ignored by both the backbenchers and opposition members.

Datuk Raja Ahmad Zainuddin Raja Omar (BN-Larut) then rose up and cited Standing Order 33(6) on speeches that could not be referred to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and the Rulers.

The situation in the house became more intense when Parliamentary Secretary of the Education Ministry Datuk Mahadzir Mohd Khir (BN-Sungai Petani) stood up to refute the allegation that the government had received instruction from the United States to close SAR following the emergence of extremist and militant groups, and clarified that the government had never intended to shut down SAR.

Mahadzir's reply, however, was not accepted by Abdul Hadi and the other opposition members. Abdul Hadi also claimed that the government had hijacked the PAS memorandum on the issue over SAR sent to the Rulers' Council which had a meeting today and would continue tomorrow.

The house will sit again tomorrow.

-- BERNAMA

FA/MHI HS AO