

**Rookie DAP rep gets a hand - from Umno MPs**

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INTERVIEW It is challenging being a Member of Parliament, especially if one does not have fluency in Bahasa Malaysia.

Bakri's DAP parliamentarian Er Teck Hwa admits to having struggled due to his lack of proficiency in the official language, but this has not deterred him from trying to keep up with the Dewan Rakyat proceedings.

NONEEr, who was educated in the Chinese medium, is noted for his persistence in trying to get his questions across to ministers.

The first-time MP has even had a helping hand - from BN's Sri Gading representative Mohamad Aziz.

He said he had raised the issue of water shortages in Johor - where Malay-Muslims predominate - but that Energy, Green Technology, and Water Minister Peter Chin Fah Kui did not understand the question.

"Then Sri Gading stood up and said: 'Bakri just said our BN stronghold (Johor) is experiencing a water shortage, so how (will Muslims perform ablutions before) prayers? The minister must act quickly to solve the problem.'

"I think I have the support of several Johor BN members - Tenggara's Halimah (Mohd Sadique) has been nice, as has the Parit Sulong representative (Noraini Ahmad)."

NONEEr readily admitted to his shortcomings with the language, but said he has been trying to remedy this.

"We should accept it when people ridicule us or say that our (command of) Malay is rotten. This is good (criticism) and we should accept it....we should improve, and show our critics that we are progressing.

"Whenever I have time, I've invited my (aides and tuition teachers) to my house to give me tuition. I've ended up spending part of my allowance on tuition fees. This is the people's money and I should return their investment."

It must have helped, for in June, Er was able to recite a pantun (poem) in Parliament about phantom voters:

Belayar kapal dek angin bertiup,  
dari China belayar ke Melaka.  
Sudah meninggal diminta hidup,  
Untuk pohon jadi warganegara.

Dari China datang Melaka,  
Singgah sebentar di Mongolia.  
Hantu dipuja sungguh istimewa,  
Dapat mengundi dalam pilihan raya.

(Setting sail with winds across the deck,  
sailing from China down to Malacca.  
The dead were asked to live again,  
to register and become citizens.

From China to Malacca,

Stopping over in Mongolia.  
The ghosts worshipped are truly special,  
they get to vote in elections.)

'Get a coat and tie'

Er, who is from Muar, joined the DAP in the 1990s because he was dissatisfied with social inequalities.

He was given his chance to contest in the 2008 election, but nearly lost his life during the campaign.

NONEExhausted after six days of campaigning, he zoned out while driving and his car plunged about five metres down the side of the road into an oil palm plantation. He sustained light injuries, however, and jumped straight back into action.

"Some people said: 'You've sacrificed a lot. It should be enough to reduce BN's (previous) majority (of 19,059) to 9,999 votes. Do not worry.'

"But I told them that I must persist. Supporters told me to give up, but I was fortunate to have my family's support," he recalled, appearing tearful.

Er won the contest against MCA's Tay Puay Chuan by 722 votes. One of the first things he did was to seek advice.

"It was my first time being a MP, so there were many things I didn't understand. I contacted (DAP) headquarters and spoke to veterans like (parliamentary leader) Lim Kit Siang.

"They told me to get a coat and tie ready and taught me how to ask questions in the Dewan Rakyat."

Er said he did not have a coat because he had never needed one - after all, his previous jobs were as plastic bag distributor, insurance agent and fitness centre general manager.

"I wore short-sleeved shirts, not long-sleeved shirts. When I went out, I would wear slippers - it was more convenient."

'I need to do better'

Since being elected, Er has raised a host of issues, including discrepancies in the National Registration Department database, accidents involving express buses and the use of cyanide in gold-mining operations in Bukit Koman, Pahang.

NONEHe sold hibiscus flowers to help keep Chinese news portal Merdeka Review financially afloat; protested in front of a Tenaga Nasional Bhd office against tariff hikes; was twice arrested for wearing the Bersih 2.0 T-shirt; and was booted out of the Dewan Rakyat for insisting on answers on Malaysia's alleged economic ties with Israel.

Although he has now been on the job for over three years, Er does not think he has done enough.

"If 60 percent is the passing mark, I think I have only 60 percent. There are certain issues that I could have handled better and I hope my constituents will forgive me because I am a first-timer.

"If the central committee permits (me to contest in the next election), I hope the electorate will give me the opportunity to raise my marks a little. Just getting 60 percent is terrible."

NONEResponding to talk of a possible seat-swap arrangement between PKR and DAP, Er said he would prefer to remain in Bakri unless the swap would make a difference between victory and defeat.

"I am more familiar with Bakri, so I hope to contest there again. Unless there are special reasons, I would (like to) make my stand in Bakri.

"We have worked hard for this constituency, so we should be respected. Since we have put in so much effort, it would be a grave loss to us if it was simply taken away."

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