

## **Dewan Rakyat now a 'medium to heaven'**

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**By Ram Anand**

COMMENT "If I knew I would go to hell (neraka), I would resign right away. I am being a minister because I want to get pahala, and go to heaven (syurga)."

One would be forgiven for thinking that after the 13th general election, the country's lower house would become less of a laughing stock and be a more productive place for discourses and policy making - or in the words of BN's much maligned Kinabatangan MP Bung Moktar Radin, less politicking.

But the first three weeks of the 13th Parliament indicate something in a completely different direction- despite an increasingly strong opposition, our Dewan Rakyat has taken a turn for the worse compared with the 12th Parliament.

NONEThe quote above is attributed to Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Shahidan Kassim, (right) who while wrapping up his ministry speech somehow veered off to a religious platform to explain why he is doing what he is doing.

This, by the way, is the minister of Parliamentary Affairs- the man tasked to give parliamentary answers about the Election Commission (EC), the Public Services Department, the elections, and also about the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC). This was the man who replaced the rather enigmatic Nazri Abdul Aziz.

If any of you had called for Nazri's head, you might not enjoy who we have got for a replacement. The line above was just a teaser.

When PKR's Bayan Baru MP Sim Tze Tzin asked Shahidan to comment on MACC's decision to close the case on alleged vote buying in Penang, Shahidan rubbished it by saying, "Don't just say MACC close the case. You must give proof, Yang Berhormat."

Sim, looking rather lethargic, had to explain that he was quoting from a proper announcement made by MACC itself and was not making up the facts himself.

Playing pucks with figures

But Shahidan pretty much outdid himself when asked to comment on the 1999 Likas by-election debacle and the court's decision declaring the by-election null and

void due to dubious voters on the electoral roll.

Shahidan spent the next half an hour trying to convince the August House that the Kota Kinabalu High Court never stated there were over 4,000 dubious voters on the electoral roll for that polls.

"This is the majority for the victor, not the amount of dubious voters. It's just an assumption," he was rather convinced.

"Hidup Shahidan!" said a government staff member observing the proceedings, applauded sarcastically.

NONEShahidan only stopped his argument when PKR's Subang MP R Sivarasa (left) scrounged around for the judgment and read it out to be explicit that the court did rule there were more than 4,000 dubious voters in the electoral roll.

A couple of times, he apologised for having too many documents to read from, and even had the time to shoot back an epic question to an MP making a reference to the member of the House holding the "Pekan" seat."

"Siapa Pekan? (Who is Pekan)?" he asked, looking lost for a while.

Pekan, for the record, is the parliamentary constituency of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

While Shahidan at least helps bring some comic relief to a rather dumbed down lower house proceedings, many of his colleagues are not as hilarious.

Sandbox politics' crowning glory

The first-time BN MPs, understandably a crucial cog in deciding and scrutinising policies in the future, seem to be busy competing with the likes of Bung Moktar as though seeking to be crowned the champion of opposition hecklers in the hall.

The noise is louder, the interruptions way more frequent, and unfortunately the first-time MPs, especially Kulim Bandar Baru's Abd Aziz Sheikh Fadzir, seemed intent on continuing the tired decade-old formula of firing personal salvos at Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim.

Fellow first-time parliamentarians seemed to have nothing better to offer than just tagging along with the same treadmill of personal attacks to debunk every question the opposition raised about government decisions.

The freshie MPs from the opposition, meanwhile, seemed to be still raw in learning the ropes and getting familiar with parliamentary procedures so much so they are not being as critical as some would have expected them to be given their civil society background.

Holding press conferences to question ministers sometimes is insufficient, people need the presence of a commanding opposition capable of giving ministers a tough time during the House proceedings itself.

But at the moment, ministers are busy making "heavenly" remarks and the opposition is letting them walk away with it in the August House.

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