

When a YB's silence is not golden
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Observers at the popular Penang Speakers Square learnt a lesson in democracy yesterday when a state assemblyperson who was repeatedly cajoled to give a speech, refused and claimed his right to remain silent.

DAP's Sungai Pinang assemblyperson Koid Teng Guan's (reading newspaper) firm rejection of the invitation to "say a few words" at the square offended the crowd, with several members lashing out publicly at him for being 'rude'.

They were visibly upset when Koid, who was sitting with a group of senior citizens away from the square, continued to read a Chinese-language daily, ignoring calls for him to take centre-stage.

"Let others speak, I do not want to, I have the right not to speak," he told those who requested him to speak.

This led a member of the crowd to tick him off for disregarding the request.

"When it's election time, they come knocking on your door and ask you to vote for them but now, when you invite them to speak, they ignore you," said the senior citizen from Ayer Itam who wanted to be known only as Albert.

"Since we vote for you to be a YB (Yang Berhmat), we can also vote for you to fall down, it is only a matter of five years (or less)," he warned, adding that Koid probably wanted a drum roll and bunga manggar to coax him into giving a speech.

Another member of the crowd, who declined to reveal his identity, made clear his annoyance with Koid's behaviour.

"There is no such thing as breakdown in communication; we do not want him to talk if he does not want to, we respect his right not to talk," said the man sternly, raising his voice at Koid.

"But he must remember 'protocol', as a YB, as a politician, he cannot ignore the people's wish, it is very rude of him to do so."

Tracy Chong, a resident of Mount Erskine, said she was mad at Koid for not even having the courtesy to say 'hello' to the crowd.

"He cannot just continue to read his newspaper when people are talking to him, I am so disappointed at his behaviour," said Chong (right in picture), who interrupted another speaker's session to express her views, much to the chagrin of the former.

"The opposition worked very hard to get the support of the people and now they cannot even say a few words; they should. They cannot say that they are not prepared to talk," she added.

Fiery salvos

When reporters first arrived, the square was a picture of peace and tranquility; the World Cup final at midnight was the prime suspect for the rather dull situation.

After 6.15pm, a crowd started to gather, but no one expected the salvos fired at the state assemblyperson.

It all started when former PKR women's chief Aminah Abdullah (wearing headscarf) spotted Koid in the crowd and invited him to respond, as she has raised many issues about Sungai Pinang and Jelutong where she resides.

Despite the loud applause welcoming him, Koid declined the invitation and continued to read his newspaper, saying he was unprepared to talk.

This annoyed Aminah who lambasted him for not paying attention to the people's voices.

"I am giving him a chance to answer all the allegations we raised about Sungai Pinang and Jelutong, but he does not want to make use of the opportunity," she said.

Asked to comment, Koid insisted that he has the right not to speak, saying he was merely a visitor waiting for a friend at the Speakers Square yesterday.

"This is an open space, others must be given a chance to talk. We cannot force people to talk when they do not want to," he said.

"I will protect my right not to speak. If I want to speak, I will organise a ceramah and invite everyone to hear me, but now I have come here to hear others speak, to relax. This is democracy."

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