

**Verbal affray at Penang forum on 10MP**  
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Participants attending a public forum on the New Economic Model and 10th Malaysian Plan at USM yesterday were caught unawares when the session turned into a political debate between Umno and Pakatan Rakyat.

penang usm forum 280710 01During the session, Deputy Finance Minister Awang Adek Hussin took Subang (PKR) parliamentarian R Sivarasa to task over the latter's presentation, which was mainly based on PR's reform agenda spelt out in its 2008 election manifesto.

Awang Adek responded to Sivarasa's criticisms against Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's economic policies by chiding the Selangor government for its recent political crises - alleged illegal sand mining activities and cronyism.

Recently, a councillor had been reported to have used the letterhead of a state exco member's office to obtain contracts worth RM1 million although the accused parties vehemently denied the allegations yesterday.

penang usm forum 280710 awang adek hussin"Actually ruling a country is much more difficult. Now ruling a state is also questionable. We know what happened in Selangor. It's hardly one term and we have a councillor using letterheads to get government contracts," said the Umno-appointed senator sarcastically.

"The Selangor MB responded that he was embarrassed as investigations are ongoing. And you talk about transparency, cleaning up the government. This (the crisis in Selangor) is so blatant," Awang Adek (left) alleged.

Organised by the Centre for Policy Research and International Studies (CenPRIS), the policy discussion, attended by about 100 participants, saw Awang Adek and former Terengganu menteri besar Idris Jusoh, also a speaker, justifying the country's lacklustre economic performance while hitting out at Pakatan for not implementing policies as promised during the last general election.

The session, moderated by Prof Chan Chee Khoo, included other speakers like CenPRIS director Mohd Azhari Karim and Kuala Lumpur-based Centre for Policy Initiatives director Lim Teck Ghee.

Flustered at forum

During the forum, Awang Adek was particularly flustered when Sivarasa spoke about the recent 81 percent plunge in foreign direct investments which startled the nation, and the ongoing brain drain which has seen Malaysia losing a high percentage of its professionals to other countries.

penang usm forum 280710 sivarasa rasiahSivarasa had said that Malaysia's performance was worse than its neighbours and that "people had voted with their feet" which resulted in outflows of the country's wealth.

Sivarasa (right), a lawyer by profession, also touched on the controversial issue of non-transparency in issuing of government contracts and mega-projects, unequal distributive justice, and yet-to-be-achieved democratic governance.

Later, he responded to Awang Adek by saying that the brain drain was an issue that the government needed to address urgently as "hundreds and thousands" of Malaysians of all races were leaving the country or investing in other countries.

Sivarasa said the Selangor government was willing to answer all allegations regarding the alleged sand mining and cronyism issues if only it were given an opportunity or space to speak out.

"The issue you raised about sand is important, I will answer it but I want to give my answer on national television... If possible I want 20 minutes on TV3. That's all we need, we want to answer. We are prepared to debate it every night if possible... I am not asking to be believed but to be heard," he pleaded.

"Let us debate it, ultimately we can agree to disagree but the people of Malaysia must have the benefit of listening to my colleague, the Selangor menteri besar.... but not only on the sand issue, others as well, and then the people can decide the truth of the matter," he added.

penang usm forum 280710 idris jusoh  
Meanwhile, Idris (right), who has been director of Mara since 2008, ticked off Sivarasa for giving the impression that Pakatan leaders were the only ones talking about "transparency" in government.

He assured participants that Umno was changing for the better as the party also addresses issues like transparency and corruption, while agreeing that all Malaysians are "in the same boat".

"Transparency is not only something the opposition talks about; we talk about it in Umno, we don't brag about it, Awang talks about it too," he said.

"If you talk about getting rid of corruption, we also talk about corruption in Umno, that is why we have come out with the NEM and 10MP," he added.

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