

Perak gov't buys ads to explain budget bill
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The Perak government has embarked on a public relations exercise following the contentious one-day legislative assembly sitting to pass a RM80 million supplementary budget bill, which the opposition claims was "rushed".

NONETwo full-page advertorials explaining a RM117 million "windfall" for the state government, hence allowing it to come up with a balanced budget, appeared today in Umno-linked NST and Malay daily Sinar Harian.

Advertorials - paid advertisement written to look like an article - usually have a phrase to denote that they are merely advertising.

The ones that have been taken up by the state government are deftly made up to appear as legitimate stories with the term "advertorial" missing.

Additionally, in the case of Sinar Harian, the page-11 article was distinguishable from other articles because the piece was contained within a border.

In the case of NST, the "article" which appeared on page-25 had tell-tale signs which include the omission of any indication whether the page was a home news item, interview, comment or analysis.

Normally, NST would either indicate "prime news" or "nation" on the "strap" at the top of the page. These were all absent.

Pakatan 'caught with pants down'

The NST "article" also carried a quotation from Menteri Besar Zambry Abdul Kadir, along with a chart and photo-caption all in the newspaper's standard format.

In fact, the advertorial in NST carried a picture byline of their journalist, uncharacteristic for a paid advertisement.

NONEThe daily had also angled their "report", supplemented with quotes by Zambry (right), to state that the Pakatan Rakyat lawmakers staged a walkout in the middle of the assembly sitting when they were "caught with their pants down after the facts and figures on the supplementary budget were revealed".

"I guess they were really embarrassed as they had made numerous allegations against the BN state government on the supplementary budget," said Zambry as quoted by the "article".

Both dailies also included graphics and tables of the forecast budget this year, for which Zambry had insisted the "extra revenue" pocketed between January and July this year amounting to RM117.26 million would effectively cancel out the RM23.89 million deficit.

Various sources have confirmed that the advertorials were paid for by the state government yesterday, amounting to nearly RM30,000 in total.

When contacted on this, one of Zambry's aides refused comment.

'Signs of desperation'

Meanwhile, state opposition leader and former Menteri Besar Mohammad Nizar Jamaluddin said that the advertorials were an act of desperation by the BN state government.

"They were public funds. If you had been open with the budget, you wouldn't have to pay a single sen and the entire sitting would be covered by all the press," he said.

It was previously reported that only journalists from national news agency Bernama and Umno-linked TV3 were allowed into the gallery.

The rest had to watch the proceedings through a window from an "observation room" and could only hear speeches through the PA system.

NONESeveral Pakatan leaders had their microphones switched off mid-speech when the debate got too heated.

"They probably thought that TV1 and TV3 could satisfy the masses. And when this didn't work, they would fork out money to pay for it. And you know that the money is not coming out from the MB's pocket," said Nizar (left).

Nizar himself was given marching orders by the speaker when he refused to obey Speaker R Ganesan's instructions to stop debating.

Nizar was allocated 15 minutes to debate on the supplementary bill but continued to speak for a further 15 minutes although his microphone was turned off.

It was only when Nizar finished giving his speech that he walked out, although he claimed that he was pushed out by one of the sergeants-at-arms, triggering a walkout by other Pakatan assemblypersons.

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