

From acting opposition leader to YB 'tarik balik'
Malaysiakini.com
November 08, 2010

Teluk Bahang (Umno) assemblyperson Hilmi Yahya had a daunting task today to deliver the opposition leader's speech on the recently announced 2011 budget at the Penang state assembly.

Hilmi, who became acting opposition leader following Azhar Ibrahim's six-month suspension from the assembly for uttering seditious remarks, however, was not prepared for the missiles awaiting him inside the Dewan.

NONEHe appeared so unprepared that at every juncture, he was interjected by Pakatan Rakyat assemblypersons, asking him to withdraw either an 'offensive' word, a 'scandalous' statement or an accusation of corruption against his opponents.

To his credit, Hilmi (left), who is a former Penang deputy chief minister, readily withdrew his problematic utterances as soon as he made them when asked to provide evidence of his allegations.

"I will retract the statement to save time," he said, although he had been asked to retract his statement about 20 times in the morning session alone.

One of his allegations involved accusing Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng of accepting bribery for his recent business trip to Australia in September.

He was shot down immediately and fiercely by the usually mild-mannered Tanjong assemblyperson Chow Kon Yeow, who demanded that he retract his accusations or provide proof within 24 hours, failing which, he would be referred to the powerful privileges and rights committee.

"I am just expressing the grievances of the rakyat," explained Hilmi, but was told to withdraw his statement by house speaker Abdul Halim Hussain, which he eventually complied with.

Hilmi, who appears to be one of the most soft-spoken debaters, got whacked again, this time for accusing the DAP-led government of handing out 'political bribes' in the form of RM100 for senior citizens.

Seri Delima assemblyperson RSN Rayer, who is well-known for his thunderous voice, demanded that Hilmi retract his accusation.

"The money is a gesture of appreciation to senior citizens, it is not a bribe. We did not give it during an election campaign," he added, insisting loudly that Hilmi retract his words.

As noisy as a market place

The proceedings today have been disrupted by row after row between YBs from the two opposing sides, rendering the house as noisy as a market place, with reporters lamenting that they could neither hear nor follow the arguments in a proper manner.

If Hilmi is described as YB 'tarik balik' for his frequent withdrawal of remarks, then Rayer

may be easily labelled as YB 'minta laluan' for frequently standing up to interject during the Umno assemblypersons' questions or debate.

Meanwhile, in the lobby of the assembly, Lim told reporters that he regretted Hilmi's action in the house today.

He condemned Hilmi for being "irresponsible" in his role as acting opposition leader.

"He has become a YB 'tarik balik' as everything he says he has to retract," said Lim.

"We find it hard to answer him because his statements are based on slander; you can't say something then tarik balik," he added.

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