

Donald Lim, MPs spar over 'national debt'

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Opposition MPs and the government again clashed in parliament over inconsistent figures in ministerial answers, this time over what constitutes hutang negara or the 'national debt'.

While fielding a question from Fong Kui Lun (DAP-Bukit Bintang), Deputy Finance Minister Donald Lim said today that national debt is the money that the country owed to foreign countries, in other words foreign debts.

"Malaysia's foreign debts exhibited a downward trend. As at September 2010, foreign debts had decreased to RM227.5 billion," said Lim.

NONE However, Azan Ismail (right)(PKR-Indera Mahkota) stood up and contradicted the deputy minister, basing what he said on the 2011 expenditure projections report distributed to parliamentarians.

"According to this, the total unpaid federal government debts is at RM446.7 billion," he contended , adding that the minister's answer brushes close to misleading the House.

Azan insisted that national debt means the entire federal government debt as he mentioned and not confined just to foreign debts.

Lim ,however, waved off the matter, saying that Azan was mistaken in his definition, clarifying that national debt means money owed to foreign countries and not the total federal government debt as read out by Azan which also includes domestic debts.

"Read la, read la, you got it wrong," added the deputy minister urging the opposition MPs to reread the document to be sure.

'No joking matter'

At a press conference at the parliament lobby later, Azan and fellow PKR parliamentarian Yusmadi Yusoff called into question the ministerial answer and pressed for a clarification from the finance ministry.

"Why is there a discrepancy of more than 50 percent between the deputy minister's answer and this official document?" said Azan, holding up a copy of the 2011 expenditure projections report.

He stressed that this matter is important as national debt is an important economic indicator for the country used by experts to evaluate the country's performance and may impact on the economy and the rakyat.

"If this continues we may have to bring him under standing order 36(12) for misleading the House," threatened Yusmadi who is Balik Pulau elected representative.

Yusmadi also contended that this is indicative of the slapstick nature of government ministerial answers.

"This is not the first time we found errors, as a responsible opposition we will go through all government answers and documents. These errors speaks ill of government competency if not their merit."

"This is no joking matter!" he added.

mca welcoming dinner for central delegates 091009 donald limMet by reporters in the parliament lobby later, Lim (right) maintained his answers showing reporters the same document with charts that show national debt reflecting what he had read out and total federal government debt matching what Azan had read out.

"Hutang negara is only foreign debts, that's why it is lower," he said, laughing off the attack on his competency by the opposition MPs.

Before Lim, Tourism Minister Ng Yen Yen came under heavy fire from opposition parliamentarians over discrepancies in her answers in parliament, leading to a near teary-eyed episode for the minister in the House yesterday as she was winding up the debate for her ministry.

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