

**Mock Parliament kicks off Penang 'democracy week'**  
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A mock Parliament involving 29 youths was held in Penang yesterday as part of an NGO-organised campaign to promote democracy.

NONEThe three-hour event, which kicked off the NGO-organised Local Democracy Week, was chaired by Penang state legislative assembly speaker Abdul Halim Hussein.

Among the "elected representatives" that took were suppose to represent the 42 Penang legislative assembly seats. However, only 29 individuals were present.

Among them were Penang PKR Youth chief Amir Ghazali, Penang PKR Youth secretary Syed Mikael Rizal Aidid, state PAS Youth leader Afnan Hamini, former Gerakan member Dalbinder Singh and Satees Muniandy, who is the assistant to Deputy Chief Minister II P Ramasamy.

NONEBN's sole representative came in form of Gerakan Youth exco member Richard Too Seng Shin (right) who staged a walk out.

Speaking to reporters later, Too said that he was unhappy with the debates as many who spoke did not stick to the topic and instead promoted their respective parties.

"I do not blame the organisers or the speakers, but I feel that the quality of some of the debate was not up to standard.

"Today's topic is about Youth. We should be non-partisan and discuss the issues seriously. Don't just make yourself a lackey of certain parties," he added.

"I can also promote my party, but I did not; I came as an individual to address the issues with facts and figures."

Speaker impressed

The six motions "passed" included one to asking the authorities to reduce the age of voting to 18 years (currently it is 21 years) and provide free education for citizens, provide more spaces for recreation and activities for youths.

NONEAnother motion urged the state and federal governments to provide free bus service to primary and secondary school children and capping university fees.

Other motions involved urging governments to establish a special fund to help youths set up businesses, protect the environment and provide easier access for youth associations involved in social and humanitarian work.

Among the observers at the event were Penang exco member Chow Kon Yeow, Komtar state assemblyperson Ng Wei Aik and Bukit Tengah state assemblyperson Ong Chin Wen. Ong stayed for the entire duration of the event.

NONESpeaking to reporters later, Abdul Halim described the event as historic and called it a good bipartisan platform for youths to experience the democratic process.

"This is not something new in western countries, but it is still fresh in Malaysia... In the United Kingdom, they have allowed 300 Youths under 17 years to commence their Youth parliament inside the Westminster building in 2008," he added.

Abdul Halim said that if the participants were ready, they may be allowed to convene the next mock Parliament in the Penang state legislative assembly next year.

Participation age will be limited to those under 21.

He adds that he was satisfied with the performance of the participants, stressing that some of them raised issues that have been overlooked by the real politicians.

As youths comprise a significant number of voters, politicians must heed their calls.

At the same conference, Suaram spokesperson Joseph Chong said the organisers will forward the six motions that were passed to the state and federal governments.

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