

DNA bill: PKR supremo leads walkout in protest
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Beh Lih Yi

Pakatan Rakyat MPs staged an angry walkout over the controversial DNA Identification Bill this evening after the government refused to set up a special committee to study the 'flaws' in the new legislation.
MCPX

Led by the new Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim who was just sworn in this morning, the MPs left the chamber in protest after a 30-minute shouting match with Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar.

pakatan mp walkout dna bill 280808 01The minister has insisted on not setting the parliamentary select committee to re-examine the new bill, which oppositions legislators had argued as fundamentally flawed and politically-motivated.

The new bill would force suspected criminals to give DNA samples but Anwar argued that it is targeted at him, as he refused to provide a sample after again being arrested on sodomy charges.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, whose seating in the House faces Anwar directly now, was present during the heated argument as he showed up towards the end of the debate.

Syed Hamid, who came under heavy fire from Pakatan MPs for his non-committal stand on the select committee took a swipe at Mahfuz Omar (PAS-Pokok Sena) at one juncture.

"This Pokok Sena is very difficult to deal with because he is staying on the tree," he said in referring to the PAS rep's constituency name, before leading to another round of arguments.

Anwar: No point in staying

In the midst of the argument, Azmin Ali (PKR-Gombak) gave an 'ultimatum' to Syed Hamid.

pakatan mp walkout dna bill 280808 02"There is an easy solution now - we just need the minister to say yes or no (to the committee)? I am sad that the prime minister can just keep his silence with the character of his minister like this," said Azmin.

As the commotion persisted, deputy speaker Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaffar said he would want to proceed with the House's proceeding and to seek the passing of the second reading for the bill.

It was at this juncture, Anwar and his Pakatan MPs then walked out from the chamber while the second reading of the bill was passed under their protest.

The third reading for the bill, which will enable it to officially become law, will only be read in December after the one-month break for the fasting month and the debate on the Budget 2009.

anwar ibrahim mp swearing in 080828 04Met later, Anwar said their decision was made due to Syed Hamid's non-committal stand.

"There are so many MPs including the backbenchers who have requested for a select committee and the minister refuses to comment on that, so there is no point of staying and participate in the debate," the Permatang Pauh MP noted.

He also voiced his disappointment at the prime minister for keeping silent on the matter.

"I don't think he was following the deliberation of the debate. This is disappointing really, the government is still in the state of denial, they don't care about public sentiments and people on the ground," added Anwar.

R Sivarasa (PKR-Subang), a lawyer by training, said the opposition has insisted on the formation for a select committee because there are a lot of "fundamental problems" with the bill.

"You can't solve it with minor amendments, you need a revamp (of the entire bill)," he argued.

Syed Hamid: A pre-emptive strike

Syed Hamid nevertheless argued that the walkout was nothing more than a political move.

He said the Anwar-led move was done because the opposition knew syed hamid albar putrajaya pc 310708 01they could not garner the adequate support should a bloc voting be called to decide on the passing of the bill.

"They walked out because they don't want it to appear like a failure for its leader who has said that he will be able to win over Barisan Nasional MPs.

"As the opposition leader, he always claimed he can get the support from BN reps but we are united and they (Pakatan) knew they will be defeated.

"They have taken an action in order to protect themselves from being shamed that they cannot get the majority they wanted to get," stressed the minister.

On whether he was disappointed with the new opposition leader, Syed Hamid said Anwar should utilise the opportunity allocated to Pakatan MPs by taking part in the debate of the bill.

"He tried to disunite BN with all sorts of action but BN today showed unity," said the home minister.

He also explained that the select committee was not necessary to be set up as the timing was wrong and that the bill was just a "small aspect of the law in respect to evidence".

Prime Minister Abdullah left without speaking to reporters. He will be presenting the 2009 Budget speech at 4pm tomorrow.

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