

Get back on subject proper, MPs reminded

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Only a handful who debated actually discussed amendments

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AFTER two and a half days of debating the Environment Quality (Amendment) Bill 2007, it took Natural Resources and Environment Ministry parliamentary secretary Datuk Sazmi Miah only an hour to wind up last Wednesday.

This was because only a handful of the 31 MPs who debated on the bill actually discussed the amendments.

The amendments included making the jail sentence mandatory for anyone caught dumping scheduled waste and a RM500,000 fine.

It proposed that the chief executive officer of a company involved in the dumping be charged in court.

The issues the MPs touched on were about global warming, river pollution due to development, floods, uncollected rubbish, leachate from landfill, smoke emission from factories and the excessive use of plastic bags.

The chair had to constantly remind the MPs to get back to the subject proper.

Datuk Badruddin Amiruldin (BN - Jerai) diverted his speech to the topic of smoking when Datuk Mohd Alwi Che Ahmad (BN - Kereh) asked whether smoking caused air pollution, although air pollution was not included in the bill.

Mohd Alwi also asked if smokers who deliberately puff smoke into the faces of non-smokers should be punished.

Badruddin said he was a social smoker, who lights a cigarette to socialise with his constituents.

Badruddin then started talking about how the Health Ministry should play its part in saving the environment by putting up signs of "No Cigars" instead of just "No Smoking".

He took the opportunity to complain about the Health Ministry and lamented his frustration on the termination of prescription drug service by the Parliament in-house clinic.



AT THE
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LAST WEEK

Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP - Kepong) joined in and said smokers caused pollution by throwing the cigarette butts everywhere.

When the MPs argued too long about smoking, Deputy Speaker Datuk Dr Yusof Yacob tried to bring their attention back to the bill.

"I do not see anything about smoking in this bill," he said.

He also reminded Badruddin that the debate should only be about the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry and not the Health Ministry.

Badruddin, however, touched on the bill in his debate the next day.

He said the RM500,000 fine was insufficient as the offenders should be charged with murder if their illegal dumping of toxic waste had affected the food chain and caused deaths among the public.

Some opposition MPs used the opportunity to hit out at the government on various issues.

Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang picked up the issue of keris when Mohd Alwi mentioned that nobody felt threatened in the olden days when Malay warriors walked around with the weapon because they were gentlemen who loved nature and environment.

When met in the Parliament lobby, Deputy Speaker Datuk Lim Si Cheng, who also tried to stop several MPs from talking about irrelevant issues to save time, said a provision in the Standing Order stated that debates must be relevant to the bill that had been tabled.

"Standing Order 36 (1) states that debates should only be about amendments in the bill and not generally about the Act.

"If all MPs focus only on the bill, this will save time," he said.

The Dewan sits again tomorrow.

»The offenders should be charged with murder if their illegal dumping had ... caused deaths among the public«

DATUK BADRUDDIN AMIRULDIN