

In Parliament, MPs trade barbs over apostasy claims
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 29 — The Dewan Rakyat descended into name-calling and insults today after lawmakers began arguing during a debate on the issue of Muslim apostasy.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom, when winding up debates on the royal address, had earlier told the House that the government was closely monitoring claims of apostasy in the country.

He said existing laws were sufficient to deal with the issue, saying additional enactments would be added if required.

Rising to interject, Zulkifli Noordin (IND - Kulim-Bandar Baharu) claimed of videos allegedly in the possession of former Selangor executive councillor Datuk Hasan Ali that purportedly show Christian priests converting Muslims out of Islam.

"So what is Jakim's (Islamic Religious Department) stand on this, with this proof that Hasan has?

"Will Jakim call Hasan to present this proof and take proactive steps to prevent this from recurring?" the former PKR lawmaker asked.

This prompted Dr Siti Mariah Mahmud (PAS-Kota Raja) to say that issues of proselytisation were not new, and that these were being used by certain leaders to create friction among the different religions.

"Why do we need to frighten others about this threat by other religions? We do not have to politicise this," she said, adding that there are sufficient laws in the country to deal with apostasy.

Zulkifli then stood to say, "The problem is, perhaps when the incident happened, Kota Raja was still wearing Pampers (diapers)."

His remark sparked anger from the floor and MPs from the opposition bench demanded the lawmaker retract his statement.

"How can you tolerate this kind of nonsense?" one lawmaker shouted to Deputy Speaker Datuk Ronald Kiandee, who was presiding at the time.

Those in support of Zulkifli began yelling in response, accusing the opposition bench of being traitors to their religion.

"You sold your God, even Allah you sold! Traitor!" some shouted.

Zuraida Kamaruddin (PKR-Ampang) then raised a point of order to demand the Deputy Speaker order Zulkifli to retract his remarks, which she labelled as "disrespectful".

Refusing to sit despite repeated orders from Kiandee, Zulkifli also attempted to raise a point of order, accusing Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad (PAS-Kuala Selangor) of calling him a "devil" and "satan".

"I would like to raise a point of order as well. I want Kuala Selangor to state in the open what he said... using the words devil and satan. Retract it. Not brave enough?" he charged.

Attempting to defuse the situation, Kiandee then ordered Zulkifli to retract his initial remarks and for Dzulkefly to explain his.

Zulkifli relented and Dzulkefly reasoned that he had merely asked the former not to behave like a "devil" or "satan".

"There are no devils or satan here," Kiandee said.

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