

Penang Opposition Leader Azhar Ibrahim Suspended For Six Months From State Assembly
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GEORGE TOWN, Nov 1 (Bernama) -- Penang Opposition Leader Datuk Azhar Ibrahim (BN-Penaga) was suspended today for six months from the State Legislative Assembly, the second time in just over two years.

Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, who tabled the motion for suspension, said the Rights and Privileges Committee had decided on the suspension after Azhar failed to explain his statement of May 8 that the assembly verbatim record could be manipulated, which the committee felt had tarnished the dignity of the assembly, Speaker Datuk Abdul Halim Hussain and staff of the assembly.

Lim said Azhar would continue to receive his salary and allowances as a state assemblyman.

"The committee met five times. The first meeting, on June 7, had exempted the Penaga assemblyman but he was summoned to the second and third meetings. However, he did not turn up.

"Therefore, at the fourth meeting, the Rights and Privileges Committee decided to suspend him from attending the assembly for six months from Nov 1," he said.

Azhar had been suspended for six months from Aug 17, 2010, for having uttered "May 13" (in apparent reference to the racial riots of May 13, 1969) while arguing with Lim (DAP-Air Putih) when winding up debate on the motion of thanks for the address by the Penang Yang Dipertua Negeri.

Meanwhile, Datuk Arif Shah Omar Shah (BN-Seberang Jaya) intervened to seek Speaker Abdul Halim's consideration not to suspend Azhar, saying that Azhar was going to retire as an elected representative.

However, Azhar, who spoke during the debate on the motion seeking his suspension, objected to the suggestion by Arif Shah.

He alleged that Lim used the fear tactic to silence those who criticised his leadership of the state government administration.

"If the opposition leader can be suspended, what more the government officers?" he asked.

During the debate, Datuk Jasmin Mohamed (BN-Sungai Dua) congratulated Azhar for having prompted Lim to decide on his suspension from the assembly.

"It has been proven that the state government does not apply the Competency, Accountability and Transparency (CAT) principle in its administration as often proclaimed," he said.

During a break in the assembly sitting, Azhar, the five-term state assemblyman who had expressed his intention to retire from politics, told reporters that he would now defend the seat in view of the support from the Penaga constituents.

"Today, I have been suspended for a second time for being bold enough to take on the chief minister. My constituents regard me as their champion. I am just waiting for the decision of the prime minister (Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak) on whether I will get to contest in the 13th general election," he said.

At the same news conference, Teluk Bahang state assemblyman Datuk Seri Dr Hilmi Yahaya said he would now assume the role of opposition leader.

"What I regret most is that the decision to suspend the opposition leader was unfair. They, especially the chief minister, decided as they liked," he said.

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