

Mustapa's reply on Kg Medan riots irks MPS

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KUALA LUMPUR: MPs saw red during the debate on the Ethnic Relations guidebook at the Dewan Rakyat, with parliamentarians from both sides of the House questioning the merit of the controversial teaching guide.

The reply by Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, especially on the Kampung Medan riots, irked not only Opposition MPs but also several from the Barisan Nasional.

Mustapa's reply to points raised in a motion by Chong Chieng Jen (DAP - Bandar Kuching) did not satisfy the MPs, who constantly fired salvos at him for purportedly "beating around the bush" in his 30-minute explanation.

On a section in page 78 of the guide which blamed Indian youths for the 2001 Kampung Medan incident, he said it was based on a paper by Datuk Dr Denison Jeyasooria, the MIC think-tank Yayasan Strategic Social executive director.

K. Devamany (BN - Cameron Highlands) objected to this, saying that "Jeyasooria's personal views does not represent the MIC's stand."

Earlier, Chong tabled a motion addressing several points in the guide which he claimed were erroneous and distorted certain historical facts.

On the controversy regarding the DAP's alleged involvement in the May 13, 1969 riots, Mustapa said it was a fact, although he did not deny the

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involvement of other political parties.

Chong said it was unfair that the guide pointed fingers at the DAP as the cause for the racial riots, arguing that the Gerakan and Umno were the ones responsible.

Datuk Razali Ibrahim (BN - Muar) said the guide would not provide much help in promoting racial relations.

"A mere 120 pages are not enough to explain such issues to students. Even the subject of the struggles of Umno was only one page long," he added.

Dr Wee Ka Siong (BN - Ayer Hitam) said the ministry should postpone teaching the subject until a thorough review had been conducted.

"It seemed like the authors were not sensitive to the feelings of Malaysians of other races when they put this guide together," he added.

"Students who have attended the course have told me that it does not mention the contribution of the Chinese and Indians at all."

Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang said the mistakes made in the guide amounted to "distort-

ing the truth."

"We should inculcate unity and move away from racial polarisation. But this guidebook is not helping matters at all," he added.

Mustapa said the text in question was only a teaching guide, adding that a proper textbook on the subject would be issued for universities soon.

He denied that the guide was sensitive, adding that it would not be withdrawn, although there were some mistakes.

"Please don't be emotional. It's only a guidebook for lecturers. I admit that there's a typographical error in relation to Article 11(4) of the Federal Constitution. I apologise. That will be corrected," he said.

Mustapa said that some paragraphs on Suqiu would also be rephrased and the word "extremist" replaced.

Meanwhile, MIC secretary-general Datuk S. Subramaniam said Dr Jeyasooria's view was personal and was not endorsed by the party.

He said the direction taken by the guide was disappointing, and the focus should be on "the richness of our racial diversity."