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Opposition aggression in Parliament a harbinger of things to come

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THE Opposition's threat to boycott the entire Parliament proceedings on Monday never materialised, but what did happen can similarly be perceived as an ill-omen.

Even before the swearing-in ceremony could commence, Opposition Leader Datuk Fadzil Noor stood up with confidence not expected of a first-timer in Parliament and declared as unconstitutional the summoning of the meeting.

A barrage of fiery words then erupted. Opposition MPs shrieked to make their voices heard over the escalating din - a thunderous roar that could be heard even outside the House's stately wooden doors.

This culminated in opposition MPs staging a walk-out.

The walk-out itself may have lasted for only 90 minutes and has been dismissed as "mere theatrics" by some, but it is undoubtedly a harbinger of things to come.

Going by their antics on Monday, the 45 Opposition MPs appear to be raring for action, and are eager to jump at any opportunity to kick up a ruckus.

The Government may have the two-thirds majority, but it looks like the Opposition will not give them an easy time. BN MPs should take heed of this as a clear warning.

Backbenchers especially, should view this seriously as their role in Parliament now has been elevated to greater heights.

Their attendance is crucial to enable a balanced face-off with the Opposition since ministers, their deputies and parliamentary secretaries sometimes have to miss the sitting given their tight schedules.

Many may have thought they could take things easy, especially more so now that the two Opposition heavyweights Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh - having failed to be re-elected MPs - will be absent from Parliament.

The proceedings, as a Government official present on Monday observed, could be even more exciting without Kit Siang and Karpal.

He was not exaggerating. The new MPs at the Opposition bench are a fiery and vocal lot, not at all bashful about speaking their minds. They are eager - obsessively so - to make their mark.

The Batu Gajah MP Fong Ko Kuan, a 26-year-old making her debut in Parliament, had the audacity to argue with the Speaker on the Parliament's rules and Constitution.

Another Opposition MP keen to show off her vocal prowess was Chong Eng (DAP-Bukit Mertajam) who questioned the Government about its priorities.

Fadzil too showed he was ready to take on the role of Opposition Leader, disrupting the proceedings and mobilising the walk-out the way he did.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had, after chairing the BN pre-council meeting recently, reminded MPs to attend Dewan Rakyat sittings.

The Prime Minister said he had sometimes found seats empty in Parliament because MPs were absent and sometimes there was no quorum.

The backbenchers would do well to pay heed to his reminder. Otherwise, they will easily be overwhelmed.

In previous sittings, only a handful of BN MPs remained in the House towards the end of the day. If this is kept up, it is not difficult to imagine them being outnumbered in the Dewan Rakyat as the Opposition's attendance record is expected to be impeccable.

There must be an ample show of force to enable them to effectively

deflect interruptions, and to ensure they get their opportunity to participate in debates.

A strength in numbers will also give a psychological boost to the new faces among the BN MPs, who may be awestruck by their mere presence among the country's lawmakers.

Opposition MPs, on the other hand, should pay heed to another bit of advice imparted by the Prime Minister: that they should respect the proceedings and the Speaker.

Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tun Mohamad Zahir Ismail has always been fair when arbitrating and making rulings.

Not paying any attention to his directives and remarks is just plain rude.

Opposition MPs should be reminded that the samseng culture has no place within the halls of the Parliament.

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