

13/11/2000

MPs should change their ways

THE behaviour displayed by two members in the Dewan Rakyat last Wednesday was not merely unparliamentary, it was simply and manifestly childish. Only children surrounded by gangs issue calls to fights, one by one.

They know, of course, the dares would not elicit response. Friends on both sides would hold them back and keep the antagonists apart.

But it is the height of irresponsibility when grown-up men, representatives elected to the august chambers of Parliament who would surely have children of their own, stoop to such silly antics.

Worse, it is unbecoming of both protagonists to deny throwing down the gauntlet, that the other drew first blood when the Hansard has a blow-by-blow record.

We say both, the backbencher and the Opposition member, are reprehensible. Indeed many others, on both benches, contributed to the shameful ruckus.

All should have been thrown out and slapped with suspensions by a more vigilant and responsible moderator sitting in the Speaker's chair.

That is the only way to curb altercations that interrupt decorous parliamentary proceedings. The Dewan has witnessed too many irresponsible interruptions over the past three weeks.

The root cause of such misbehaviour is a patent lack of understanding of the role of a Member of Parliament.

Many MPs on the Government bench assume their responsibility is to shout down Opposition members, some of whom presume their duty is to persistently demand time to table partisan concerns and issues.

The order of the day is ignored. Given such attitudes, whither meaningful and decorous debates? And some dare to talk about intellectual debates.

The ongoing session is the Budget meeting. The 2001 Budget was tabled by the Finance Minister three Fridays ago.

But how many MPs take the Government's income and expenditure proposals seriously?

Attendance tabulated by the New Straits Times shows that since Oct 30 not more than 80 MPs were present in the Dewan. And we have 193 representatives, elected by the people to be their ears, eyes and mouths in Parliament.

True, a good number hold executive office as Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries.

Their duties prevent them from being present all the time. But the dispensation does not extend to about 140 other MPs.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has voiced concern over the absenteeism on more than one occasion.

He has even hinted that Government backbenchers with a poor attendance record might not be on the list of candidates for the next general election. But that warning has not quickened the malingerers to change their ways.

Some remain content with attaining the prefix Yang Berhormat. They wantonly ignore the attendant duties and responsibilities of an elected MP.

We know and they know, too, that the truant student is punished and the absentee worker's take-home pay is docked. But the malingerers among MPs? They continue to draw their allowance, regardless of their attendance in

Parliament.

As law-makers of the land, they present poor role models as did the MPs involved in the acrimonious altercation in the Dewan on Nov 8, in front of a group of students seated in the public gallery.

(END)