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Debate and the rules of conduct

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DEWAN Rakyat Speaker Tun Mohamad Zahir Ismail is a very patient and tolerant man, a real gentleman.

And when he blows his top, one knows something is seriously wrong.

At the Dewan Rakyat last week, the soft spoken and ever smiling Mohamad Zahir blew his top.

The person who learned the hard way that there is a limit to everything was none other than Kota Melaka MP and DAP secretary-general Kerk Kim Hock.

Kerk's repeated refusal to sit down when asked to do so by the Speaker and his continued verbal attack on Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Chan Kong Choy, who was winding up the debate on the Supplementary Supply (2000 and 2001) Bill, incurred Mohamad Zahir's wrath.

The Dewan Rakyat Speaker had Kerk thrown out of the House.

And suspended him from attending the sitting for three days.

His decision sent shock waves throughout the House. It was something the MPs had least expected - that someone like Mohamad Zahir could do that.

Mohamad Zahir is a pleasant man, forthright when giving his opinions and sincere.

But being a Speaker is no easy task. Mohamad Zahir deserves praise for doing what he did to Kerk. Kerk truly asked for it.

For his years as Dewan Rakyat Speaker Mohamad Zahir has earned a solid reputation.

Many describe him as a good man, a responsible Speaker.

Being an experienced judge, Mohamad Zahir can argue well on points of law and regulation.

Members of the Press who have been covering Parliament would remember some of the earlier Opposition MPs, such as former DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang and former DAP chairman Karpal Singh.

Lim and Karpal could be vicious in their attacks on the Barisan Nasional and the Government but never once did they show disrespect or were rude to the Speaker or his deputies.

The Speaker was always treated by all with respect.

The situation today is different. Most of the MPs, from the Opposition in particular, have no respect for the House.

The younger generation in the DAP have apparently lost the courteous nature of their predecessors.

This is a terrible state of affairs.

The Opposition argued that since the Speaker is appointed by the ruling party, his allegiance would be with the Government. Many said that as an experienced Speaker, Mohamed Zahir should uphold the democracy of Parliament.

"Tun has made a serious mistake. It is his duty to uphold democracy," they lamented.

But the fact that Mohamad Zahir has, in many instances, voiced his dissatisfaction over the actions of some Barisan Nasional members for the same reason demonstrates his fairness.

We have observed many MPs over the years.

Some of them, no doubt, feel that they are the "chosen ones" and therefore, should be treated as such.

Some are good at passing "smart remarks" when and where necessary, while there are some who really voice their concern about issues affecting the

people.

However, nowadays, it is quite difficult to look for a really impressive and effective MP.

It may be time for both the Opposition parties and the BN to review the criteria for the appointment of MPs.

We do come across some MPs who want things done for the people which is exactly what people expect from their elected representatives but, sadly, many MPs seem to have lost their fire - or may be they just did not have it in the first place.

In the House nowadays, rarely do we hear MPs talking about the welfare of the people. Many choose to speak in the interest of the party they represent instead.

One clear example was when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tabled the Outline Perspective Plan in Parliament recently.

Instead of debating the plan most MPs preferred to politicise the matter, forgetting that the more important agenda was to put the economy back on its feet.

It is also surprising to note that most of the Opposition MPs have not proposed any ideas on how to get the economy back on track.

They have not said something like: "This is what Pas, Keadilan or even DAP would do ...".

Instead, they choose to heckle the Government and politicise issues relating to the so-called unfair treatment given to Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Maybe it's about time we rate the performance of the MPs in the past few meetings - decide whether or not they are worth entrusting our votes to.