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MPs who back finesse, tolerance

A. Kadir Jasin

THE heckling that greeted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he tabled the Third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP3) on Tuesday was not out of the ordinary.

Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin went through the same experience when he tabled the 2001 Budget last October.

Ministers and other supporters of the Government are being booed and jeered more often now, a sort of balas dendam (revenge) by the Opposition bench.

This is only to be expected. There are more Opposition representatives (45 in the 193-strong) Dewan Rakyat. For a long time they suffered the torment of the majority government bench.

Now is the time to turn the tables on their tormentors. With many of the Opposition MPs being new and eager to make an impact, parliamentary decorum often takes a back seat.

We can say that some members are inherently loud-mouthed while others are unruly. But such is the imperfection of democracy.

More often than not showmanship takes precedence over wisdom. The wisest and the most intellectual are not necessarily the winners.

It is for this very reason that not many intellectual people get elected even though they are active members of political parties. Among those who are elected, their ability to make good in politics is unimpressive.

The voters are more likely to elect kaki keloloh and kaki lawak (jokers) than an intellectual. Such a person has to bring himself down to the level of the kaki lawak and often with disastrous results.

The MPs complained that they had not been given enough time to study the document. But the nagging question is how much time and attention MPs on both sides of the House give to documents such as the OPP and the Budget.

It would not come as a surprise if most of them are more than happy to wait for the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance to read out the documents to them.

The heckling aside, a lively Parliament is good for the MPs and the people. The MPs have less time to fall asleep or to while away time in the canteen and the lobby. They have to be more prepared.

The older Malaysians surely remember the days in the sixties when Dr Mahathir, Lee Kuan Yew and late Syed Jaafar Albar crossed swords in Parliament. Even parliament reporting by the media was a lot more informative and entertaining those days.

A good debate does not have to be rude and crude. The lack of tolerance and the absence of finesse among the majority of our MPs speaks poorly of our education system and our social upbringing.

If MPs do not respect parliamentary decorum, which is the cornerstone of courtesy and civility, one wonders whether they are deserving of their honourable status.