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## Women take lead in Parliament

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THE third session of the 10th Parliament opened by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong on Monday saw several firsts.

History was created when two women MPs were chosen to table and second the motion of thanks on the royal address. Arau BN representative Mastika Junaidah Husin spent two-and-a-half hours delivering her speech that touched on various subjects.

She was interrupted on numerous occasions by MPs seeking clarifications but handled the situation well.

One example was when Dr Syed Azman Syed Ahmad Nawawi (Pas-Kuala Terengganu) suggested that her earlier remark that civil servants were not supportive of the Government could be regarded as "gunting dalam lipatan" (treacherous).

Mastika Junaidah warned the Pas MP not to twist her words, saying that Pas was trying to create a rift between civil servants and the Government by exploiting her remarks.

To set the record straight, the MP said she highlighted the matter to illustrate the importance of teamwork and co-operation between the Government and those under its employment.

MIC's M. Komala Devi (BN-Kapar) completed the domination by women on the first day of debate in the Dewan Rakyat when she rose to second Mastika Junaidah's motion.

On Wednesday morning, Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin gave MPs something to look forward to when he attended the question-and-answer session to clarify issues pertaining to the Government's purchase of Malaysia Airlines Berhad shares from Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli.

His appearance on a Cabinet meeting day was also a first for the House.

That fact escaped the attention of many as Daim, cutting a lone figure in the area where Ministers normally sit, stood for more than 30 minutes responding to criticisms on the transaction that saw the Government again taking over control of Malaysia Airlines.

The Finance Minister's presence demonstrated the Government's seriousness in tackling the controversy that arose following the transaction.

It was in line with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's promise on Monday that the Government would clarify in detail issues like the Malaysia Airlines shares, the relocation of the SJK(C) Damansara, the clashes among residents in Kampung Medan and its nearby areas.

On Tuesday, Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad provided a lengthy reply to the Damansara school issue, spending some 15 minutes deliberating on the chronology of events leading to the brouhaha.

One key element which helped silence Opposition MPs in the House was the sheer bulk of details he dispensed that showed the ministry had nothing to do with the decision to relocate.

Musa even quoted correspondence from the school's board of governors, Parent-Teacher Association and the headmaster seeking permission to move out as the old premises was deemed no longer conducive for students.

The Minister should be commended for taking the time to explain the issue that even Kerk Kim Hock (DAP-Kota Melaka) congratulated him in the lobby for a "job well done".

Datuk Ahmad Husni Mohd Hanadzlah (BN-Tambun) expressed disappointment over the failure of the authorities to take "the bull by its horns" in

addressing certain issues early.

He pointed out that the failure or delay in coming out with the full facts on certain issues, may tip the balance in favour of rumours and unfounded stories.

Some may argue that there is no guarantee that detailed explanations and answers would satisfy the public.

This is true as the dissenting quarters would always be around, as pointed out by Daim.

"To those who choose not to agree, no amount of explanation will be able to satisfy them. And for the Opposition, if they are satisfied, they will not be the Opposition. That's why they are called the Opposition."

The Dewan Rakyat has lately become a favourite assembly ground for parties unhappy with certain decisions. On Thursday, parents with children at the Damansara School turned up at Parliament, armed with invitation letters for MPs to visit the school.

On Tuesday, between 40 and 50 people claiming to represent some non-Governmental organisations tried to submit a memorandum to the Prime Minister on the Kampung Medan clashes.

Prevented entry by the police, the group gathered at the gates for a few hours before dispersing.

Inside the House, the proceedings were routine except for the occasional fireworks when MPs from both sides clashed verbally.

One instance was when Mohamad Sabu (Pas-Kuala Kedah) warned of chaos if organisations and political parties were prohibited from using the word "Islam" in their names.

He said he was prepared to be detained under the Internal Security Act for opposing the move, prompting a howl of protest from backbenchers.

As it turned out, Mohamad's outburst was unnecessary as the Rulers' Council, which deliberated the matter at its meeting on Thursday, did not object to the use of the word "Islam" in organisations as long as it did not confuse the community or for deviant purposes.

Datuk Shahnnon Ahmad, the Pas MP for Sik and controversial writer of the novel *Shit*, also created a first when he made his maiden speech in the House since his election in 1999.

He was on sick leave since being elected.

The Dewan Rakyat will reconvene on Tuesday after the weekend break and Maal Hijrah public holiday.