

LETTER | Political posturing and pandemonium in Parliament

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LETTER | When the emergency was first proclaimed, I had a sense of dread and confusion.

I was confused on how the emergency would be expedient for coping with Covid-19, a crisis that seemed to be weighted towards the need for aid and health measures rather than the proclamation of a darurat.

The suspension of Parliament—the MCO notwithstanding— contributed to the sense of dread that grew in tandem with the worsening pandemic. This week, seven months after the emergency was first proclaimed, we finally had the first seating of Parliament. As the rakyat, I had high hopes for this special session.

It is an understatement to say that many Malaysians have been living under difficult times. While we were reasonably successful in containing the virus last year, this year, it seems every other person we know has either been infected,

succumbed to the virus or survived Covid-19. This has also become personal to me, as my family lost two elderly relatives to Covid-19. Even so, we may be luckier than others, who may have lost not only their loved ones but also their way of life.

I am sure many Malaysians have been anxiously waiting for this current Parliament session after months of the darurat. We all needed to make sense of when this alarming crisis will end and I had so many questions in mind. I had hoped this Parliament session would provide more clarity and perhaps shine some light on the nation's way forward. Yet, no sooner had the session started than I started feeling a sense of dismay and as the hours of non-stop shouting, heckling, jeering and taunting passed, those feelings turned to utter disgust.

While I had hitherto been impartial, this time around, I had more issues with the opposition than with the government MPs. Their opposing voices could have yielded many more constructive ideas and solutions attending to the urgency of solving Covid-19, as opposed to constant nit-picking on procedural matters.

It was another typical mess of screaming MPs, with the opposition wasting precious hours with political tirades rather than addressing the Covid-19 pandemic itself. The nation could not listen to the PM's speech uninterrupted and to my shock, even when he called for a moment of silence and for fellow Muslim

MPs to recite a holy verse in remembrance of Covid-19 victims, that solemn moment was drowned out by deafening shouts and name-calling. Where was the respect for our nation's Covid-19 victims? The situation resembled a classroom of delinquents rather than a noble hall of democratically-elected representatives. Is this the hallmark of Malaysia's democracy?

The saving grace was perhaps when our Finance Minister Tengku Zafrul Aziz took the floor later in the afternoon, the temperature was noticeably lower, perhaps due to the fact he is a technocrat rather than a politician. Finally, there seemed to be some real questions and highlights of the real situation on the ground, an example being the Sabah representatives who asked about the lower rate of vaccination in the Land Beneath The Wind (it was due to lower MySejahtera registration, apparently). There was even a light moment when Zafrul, at the slip of the tongue mentioned 'Lembah Pantai' when he meant 'Lembah Klang', inviting teasing remarks from both sides of the floor on whether the senator was setting his sights on contesting the constituency.

Despite my previous misgivings about the emergency proclamation, I switched off my screen feeling disheartened and now think that the darurat was perhaps justified.

I am going to say it plainly that the government could have done better. Yet, given

the largely dysfunctional Dewan Rakyat yesterday, I can't help but think that the emergency was needed for the country. I wonder how much worse it could have been had every decision and measure in the last seven months were to undergo this same chaotic Parliament's scrutiny. This was, after all, the same opposition that last year sought to block the passing of the national budget which would have paralysed all government machinery in, among others, disbursing aid to the needy. What else would we have lost had it not been for the emergency; or if instability had forced us into an impasse on crucial life-and-death decisions such as vaccine procurement and utilisation of private hospitals?

At the very least, with the emergency the country has benefited from four more swiftly introduced financial aid packages; boosted our national vaccination and even managed to retain our sovereign ratings by global credit ratings agencies (Fitch, Moody's and S&P - although all three clearly warned that political instability could downgrade future ratings). Thanks to the emergency, we managed to 'immunise' all these efforts against irresponsible politicians' sabotage in the last two quarters. A ratings' downgrade would have adversely impacted our already battered economy.

Recently, the government invited members from the opposition parties to join the National Recovery Council that oversees the recovery plan. For us rakyat, this is a glimmer of hope that MPs from both sides can cooperate to steer this nation

out of this pandemic. Despite the appalling lack of respect and decorum at Parliament this week, I hope the opposition MPs are gracious enough to accept this olive branch and set aside their differences to fight our common enemy, Covid-19.

Just for once, instead of dishing out yet more pandemonium in Parliament, can politicians stand unified on the pandemic? The country has suffered enough. As the rakyat, we deserve a much better show of leadership and statesmanship from our politicians.

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