

DAP: S'wak BN afraid of the truth
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The Sarawak government is afraid of the truth being told and is trying to stifle the opposition with a new law - or so an opposition assemblyperson claimed today.

"After two sessions of the state legislative assembly (since the state election in May last year), so much of the truth has been told that it has really hurt the Barisan Nasional (BN) government," said Kota Sentosa assemblyperson Chong Chieng Jen.

Chong, who is state DAP secretary and member of Parliament for Bandar Kuching, was reinforcing his party's criticism of a proposal to table the State Legislature (Privileges and Powers) Bill 2007 in place of the 1963 Ordinance.

He said this was the state government's attempt "to shut the mouths of opposition members because they are afraid of more truth coming out".

The DAP has six representatives in the 62-member state assembly. Opposition Parti Keadilan Rakyat has one, while there are two Independents.

The Bill is scheduled to be tabled when the House sits from May 14 and is expected to be passed because the BN holds the majority of the seats.

The explanatory statement in the Bill says its aim is to streamline the powers and privileges of the House, the Speaker, members and committees with those of the Parliament (Privileges and Powers) Act 1952.

Additionally, it seeks to regulate the conduct of members and people in the precincts of the House, while protecting those responsible for the publication of reports of the proceedings of the House and its committees.

'Hiding the truth'

Chong said state cabinet ministers have not been able to give satisfactory answers to questions previously raised by the opposition in the House.

"They are not only attempting to shut the mouths of the opposition but also to hide the truth about their own incompetency from the public," he alleged.

"They are trying to prevent criticism of decisions of the Speaker and of the House (by inserting new clauses in the Ordinance)."

However, Chong said opposition members are determined to continue playing their role and to speak out on wrong-doing by the government whenever this arises.

Asked what impact the Bill would have on the role of the House, he said "the government might as well amend the constitution to do away with the state assembly system because the Bill is clearly intended to take away the fundamental functions of the state assembly".

As to whether the opposition would challenge the law in court he would only say: "Let's wait and see."

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