

NUJ decries 'confinement' at Perak assembly
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The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has urged Perak state legislative assembly speaker R Ganesan to restore the old practice of allowing the press to be placed inside the assembly chambers to cover proceedings.

NONE In a statement today, NUJ general secretary V Ambalagan, on behalf of the union council, expressed regret over the "confinement" of the press in the public gallery during the Aug 3 sitting, and the previous sitting in April.

He said that the arrangement impedes the media's ability to follow debates because microphones were allegedly switched off during exchanges between the government and opposition bench.

"We were also informed that only official media were allowed to be present to capture visuals and take photographs at the state assembly hall, while others were restricted to the glass chambers," he said.

The NUJ is also protesting the requirement of prior registering of journalists by the state information department.

During the sitting, only journalists who obtained a special pass from the state information department a few days before the sitting were allowed to cover the proceedings, complicating any last-minute replacements.

"These are all unprecedented in the history of state assemblies and Malaysian Parliamentary practices."

Remove obstacles

The NUJ urged Ganesan to remove all obstacles and extend cooperation to the media fraternity.

"The media must be allowed to carry out its democratic function - to follow the proceedings and inform the people of Perak accurately on issues that affected them," said Ambalagan, on behalf of the NUJ council.

NONE Contacted for reactions, Ganesan (right) reiterated his past remarks that most news organisations were barred from entering the assembly hall because, in the past, the opposition had exploited their presence.

"The opposition would be giving interviews inside the chamber when the assembly sitting was in progress and attempt other heroics," he said.

"In order to maintain decorum inside the assembly hall, we have a special chamber for the press where they can follow the proceedings comfortably. We also increased the number of electrical points for their equipment."

'Perak situation unique'

He said that the situation in Perak cannot be compared to other states because of the "behaviour of the opposition", in which they allegedly repeatedly ignored the speaker's instructions.

"I would love to restore the old system, but this can only be done should all the assembly persons act responsibly, follow the speaker's orders, the standing orders and show some decorum.

mohammad nizar jamaluddin "But instead, (Opposition Leader) Nizar (Jamaluddin) (right), for example, refers to me as 'Mr Ganesan'. If the opposition follows the rules, then there will be a proper running of proceedings. But they are bent on causing chaotic situations," he said.

In addition, Ganesan said that he could not accommodate all the press because of space limitations. Only federal government-owned Bernama and privately-owned TV3 were allowed to record visuals during the sitting.

Ganesan also denied claims that the public announcement system had been tampered with in favour of the government bench.

"I should know. I sit in the (speaker's) chair," he said, explaining that whenever he speaks, the assemblypersons would have to listen and not interrupt.

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