

**An unfriendly Dewan to opposition members**  
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NEWS FOCUS: The Sarawak State Legislative Assembly, which resumed sitting on Monday until the 10th, was branded by the Opposition as being unfriendly and un-democratic to them.

The assembly used to be peaceful following the 2001 State election as there was only one opposition DAP Kidurong state assemblyman, Chew Chiu Sing, and an Independent for Meluan, Wong Judat.

Barisan Nasional (BN) had 60 seats. Its coalition comprised of Parti Persatu Bumiputera Bersatu(PBB), Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS) and Sarawak Nasional Party (SNAP).

It was said that those sessions were so peaceful then, that many in the August House would take an afternoon nap without interruption.

The situation changed after the 2006 State election when DAP captured six seats, PKR one, SNAP one, and Independent one. BN got 62 seats out of the 71 contested. Two noticeable opposition members would not be around to make their statements: The State Assemblyman for Kota Sentosa and MP for Kuching, Chong Chieng Jen; and State Assemblyman for Padungan, Dominique Ng, the sole PKR ADUN in Sarawak.

On May 19 this year, Ng was suspended for his "Kangaroo court" remark while Chong was found to be in contempt. Both were suspended for a year.

Ng was charged for saying, "This is a Kangaroo Court. Let's count the Kangaroo. Come hop, hop, hop" while Chong faced two charges for his refusal to substantiate his allegation that "the so called Chinese expert engaged by SUPP in the year 2004 must be a lie."

Flood was all over Sarawak then and SUPP was said to have engaged Chinese experts to study the flood situation.

Chong was charged for implying that Daud Abdul Rahman (BN-Tupong) was the cause of death of a hawker who committed suicide when the latter was asked to relocate his stall from Gambier Street to Stutong Community Market.

Chong was said to have gone too far for saying Daud, who oversaw the relocation, had blood in his hands. Both remarks were mentioned in the 2009 May's sitting.

He was also said to have breached his privileges by the Committee of Privilege when he walked out of the DUN.

Despite being suspended, Chong had prepared 10 questions to the Dewan two weeks ago.

On Oct 29, he received a reply from the Speaker that his 10 questions put forward to the Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud would not be answered on the ground that he was still suspended.

The questions were about the allegations against Taib in the Sarawak Report website and

about the Bakun Hydro Project, Sarawak International Medical Centre and some land issues.

Calling it an act of protection, Chong said it was an underhand tactic by the state assembly to avoid the chief minister from being questioned.

Chong also recalled a question he asked about the amount of money spent on the project of First Silicon, now X-Fab Sarawak. The Second Finance Minister Wong Soon Koh replied that the project was a good investment for the future.

"All I wanted to know was how the public fund will be spent and to ensure that there was no wastage" he pointed out.

DAP state assemblywoman for Pending, Violet Yong was also crying foul over the undemocratic answers given from written questions brought out to the DUN.

During this year's May session, Yong had asked the Chief Minister on the development and upgrading projects which have been approved and carried out in the constituencies of Padungan, Pending, Batu Lintang, Kota Sentosa and Batu Kawa in between 2007 to 2011.

She wanted detailed answers in table forms and also the total amount of allocation for development carried out in the five constituencies in Kuching.

However, she was not satisfied with the lackadaisical answers she received, which stated that a total of 37 physical state-funded projects and sub-projects with an allocation of RM234.5 million were approved as of October 31 last year.

The answers also stated that a total of 33 projects were completed and 584 federal projects with an allocation of RM7, 293 million have been approved.

The answers provided to Yong did show many governments and private projects were approved and implemented, but most importantly lack in full details as the projects were not listed out accordingly.

"These are half-hearted answers and these people paid with the tax payer's money are finding it tedious to let the people know what the government is doing and how the public fund was spent," she said to MM.

The opposition realized that they are in the minority in the present composition of the Sarawak Dewan. Furthermore, with Chong and Ng both suspended in procedures which they consider undemocratic, the opposition have much less voice in the August House.

Besides issuing statements, the other way to get their voices heard is through submission of written questions. However, this has been limited as the opposition claimed that their questions posed in the Dewan were either inaccurate or inadequately addressed.

These revelations ring the similar tones made by the opposition that they have no voice in the Dewan, not because of the lack of effort, but the underhand tactics used by the Barisan-controlled House.

If the public have mistakenly perceived that only Kuching assembly members from the opposition side had tried their best to be heard, anyone attending the Dewan would realize that the opposition members from the other constituencies also have tried their best.

It is a known fact that their statements in the mainstream media are either played down or simply omitted.

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