

MY FAILED MISSION

— BY SHAHRIR

NST-6/5/2006

The high drama in Parliament on Thursday over the issue of an MP asking Customs officers to 'close one eye' following the seizure of sawn timber has left some niggling questions unanswered — particularly those pertaining to the resignation of Datuk Shahrir Samad as Barisan Nasional Backbenchers Club chairman and the role of MPs in general. **V. VASUDEVAN, M.K. MEGAN, HAMIDAH ATAN and FARRAH NAZ KARIM report.**



I was willing to face the consequences as we need to show that there are BN members who are for integrity.

Shahrir

PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Shahrir Samad's resignation as chairman of the Barisan Nasional Backbenchers Club has been accepted.

This follows his meeting yesterday with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak who also agreed to establish a special committee to formulate guidelines on the proper conduct of Members of Parliament when dealing with Government departments.

Shahrir spoke to reporters of his "failed mission" to openly promote integrity among MPs.

He even took a swipe at certain politicians in the country's administration whom he said considered themselves to be smarter than the rest.

The following are excerpts of the Press conference.

Q: What transpired in the meeting just now?

A: I met the Deputy Prime Minister as the BN's chief Whip and told him that I need to resign as I had breached the party's directive against supporting an Opposition's motion. That is why I resigned. If I hadn't that day, the media would have queried me on my actions after failing to get support from BN members as BBC chairman, and why go against the party's stand. So before it happens, I might as well quit. My decision was accepted by the DPM.

Q: You said yesterday that you resigned as you did not get support?

A: That is one reason, but I have also clearly breached a directive.

Q: You supported the Opposition's motion despite being aware of the consequences?

A: I felt I needed to face the issue. All this while the Opposition had been criticising the BN MPs saying that we are not serious about corruption and integrity. That we are of third class mentality and don't walk the talk. I felt that if we reject the motion, we are giving another issue to the Opposition to pick on. It was also to bring to the committee the issue of proper conduct of MPs when dealing with Government departments. At present, there is no such thing. That is why we see cases of the police and district officers



A section of the sawn timber logs that was seized by the Customs Department.

being approached for "help" and hospitals asked not to conduct post-mortem. Unless there is a dos and den'ts for MPs on this matter, there will be more problems. That's why this is an important issue to discuss. I proposed to the chief Whip to form a committee (jawatankuasa pilihan) to study the ethics of MPs in dealing with them (government officers). This is also to avoid a situation when civil servants brush MPs off, as "they should not be interfering with their operations" as that itself could weaken the stature of MPs.

Q: What did the DPM say to your proposal?

A: He agreed to it and acknowledged that it was a problem.

Q: What about the BBC members' appeals for you to return?

A: It is not an issue. I have feelings too, when, as a BN member, I am constantly criticised for seemingly having no stand on the issue of fighting corruption. I can't be banking on the large number of BBC members and its majority to win debates. We need to win debates on facts. That is why I supported the motion. I was willing to face the consequences as we need to show that there are BN members who are for integrity. So if they want to discipline me, it's not a problem as I can discipline myself first.

Q: Do you think the only reason the BBC members did not support you was because of the party ruling?

A: I wouldn't know as many reasoned that it was an Opposition's motion. I said ok. Whatever reason they chose to stand up to, it is up to them. I can't read their minds. For me, I want to see integrity among the MPs. Sadly, it was not supported and I accept the fact that not many... no one stood by me.

Q: You would have resigned for supporting an Opposition's motion even if you had got the support?

A: If I had the support and the motion was ac-

cepted, it would not have been a problem. Action couldn't have been taken against so many of us. But the motion was rejected and I concede that I failed to get the BN MPs' support. This is politics, but if it is only about using the power of majority, anybody can do it. But if in politics, there are no principles, what's the point? That is why it should have been supported.

Q: Any regrets?

A: The good thing that came out from this is that the DPM agreed to the committee I proposed and study the MPs conduct with civil servants. If we keep looking at matters like this as trivial ... say that investigations at the committee level would be read as "not transparent", we are belittling our own MPs. Don't tell me when an MP becomes a Minister, the rest are stupid. At times, the frontbench is also at fault. Just because you are a Minister you are smarter? That is also why we see issues like Parliament attire cropping. When the Cabinet makes a decision, it is forced down the Parliament's throat. We have rulings, processes and MPs' rights. If we can't respect that, what will happen to Parliament? Are we to respect the Cabinet only? The Cabinet exists because of Parliament.

Q: As BBC chairman, were you disappointed with your backbenchers for not supporting the motion?

A: No...I am not disappointed with them, they will have to learn to be disappointed with themselves.

Q: What about your political future?

A: All this while I've been an MP. I became chairman of the BBC because I was asked to. I am not interested in all these things and I know that my ideologies and approaches are different. I take my responsibilities and job seriously and I am very passionate about Parliament and politics and hoped to make changes. If I have to quit, it does not mean that I failed, as some good came out of it. This is politics. My conscience is clear that I only did what was for the good.