

Lopsided devt fueling Sarawak secession talks, Chong tells Parliament

KUCHING (Sept 23): More Sarawakians are entertaining the idea of the state seceding from Malaysia because of the unfair and lopsided development between the peninsula and Sarawak, said Stampin MP Chong Chieng Jen.

In his debate on the motion of thanks for the King's Address in Parliament yesterday, the DAP Sarawak chairman pointed out that 58 years after Sarawak helped form the Federation of Malaysia, Sarawakians remain one of the poorest people in the country.

"One of the key factors that leads to this sentiment of independence of Sarawak is the unfair and lopsided development between West Malaysia and Sarawak, so much so that many Sarawakians feel that on Sept 16, 1963, we moved from being a colony of the British government to a colony of the Malayan government," he said.

Citing figures released by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, Chong said the median household disposable income for Sarawak in 2019 was only RM3,994 while the median household disposable income for the country was RM5,116.

He said this shows that the average household income of Sarawakians is well below par as compared to the nation's average household income.

"Of course, the federal government is responsible for this imbalanced situation, but the Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) government is also to be blamed, more so while the state government has chalked up a reserve of RM26 billion while keeping the common Sarawakians poor and with income below our national standard.

"To deflect their responsibility of making Sarawakians poor, the GPS leaders have constantly put the blame solely on the federal government," he said.

Chong said to address this issue of imbalanced economic development between the regions, a greater proportion of the RM45 billion additional injection into the economy as proposed by Pakatan Harapan (PH) in the recently-signed MoU between Putrajaya and the opposition, should be allocated to help the people and businesses in Sarawak.

He said that during the 22 months of the PH government, they had increased the proportion of the national development allocation for Sarawak, and hoped that this trend would be continued by the current administration.

"As for the Covid-19 economy stimulus packages that have been announced and allocated since March 2020, I also call upon the ministers in their reply to provide a breakdown in the figures and proportions allocated for Sarawak," he added.

Chong further said that the second key factor that has led to the rise in the secession sentiment amongst Sarawakians is the fear how the federal government is handling religious matters.

Referring to the proposal by the deputy minister of religious affairs in the Prime Minister's Department who announced that the government is working on four Syariah laws which include the restriction on the propagation of non-Islamic religion, Chong said the move is seen as "shaking the very foundation of the formation of Malaysia."

He said The Association of Churches in Sarawak (ACS) had responded by saying such move directly contravenes the very spirit of the formation of Malaysia where Sarawak, Sabah and Malaya are equal partners.

Chong reminded that the first item in Chapter 3 of the Inter-Governmental Committee Report signed on Feb 27, 1963 is the guaranteed right to religious freedom in the Federation.

"We formed Malaysia in 1963 as a secular state with Islam as the official religion of the country. We, Sarawak, did not join to form Malaysia to become a Taliban state.

"If the federal government, with PAS as a partner and GPS giving its full support, is minded to proceed along with PAS' agenda of making Malaysia an Islamic state or even a Taliban country, there is every justification for Sarawak to secede from the country as it has destroyed the very foundation of the formation of Malaysia," he said.

Chong said to address this issue, the Prime Minister must come forth to assure all Malaysians that no such law will be drafted, tabled or passed in Parliament, in line with the latter's 'Keluarga Malaysia' concept.

"Anything short of the Prime Minister making such an assertive statement is not sufficient to allay the fears of non-Muslims in this country and to reassure all Malaysians what it means to be 'Keluarga Malaysia'.

"All of us want Malaysia to progress with common prosperity, not only amongst all races but also amongst the different regions, the East and the West. There are things that we Sarawakians hold dearly to our hearts and amongst them is the freedom of religion.

"I therefore urge the government not to overstep these boundaries and limits so as not to cause further divide amongst the people and the breakup of the nation," said Chong.

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