

[Letter to the Editor] Dirty dancing in Gawai do a transgression disturbing balance between man and nature

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By Prof Datuk Dr Jayum Jawan

A recent viral video on how the dancers were dressed and displaying questionable dancing moves at a Gawai do has invited various opinions among Dayak netizens and in many WhatsApp groups of which I am a member.

The video also shows a backdrop displaying two prominent local representatives, one of whom has come out to defend the do while the other has remained silent.

The issue is not so much about the dancers and how they were dressed but that the performance was perhaps displayed on the wrong occasion, Gawai Dayak, which the Dayak consider both a cultural and religious festival.

Thus, the guests of honour who had lent their names to the event might be considered insensitive, ill-advised, and shameless for defending an undefendable misjudgement on their part.

Both representatives are no strangers to the Dayak community and presumably would have some understanding of the community's adat, customs, and traditions.

In this case, they have caused hurt to the Dayak community as the Gawai do is a desecration of the Dayak adat, custom and tradition and therefore committed an act of transgression, i.e. disturbing the balance of peace between 'man and nature'.



According to Dayak/Iban adat, custom and tradition, this calls for a fine or 'ukum' to restore the 'disturbed balance' of the universe so that men may continue to live in peace and harmony among themselves, and between themselves and the universe.

This may be meaningless to the transgressors. At best, they would think: What are a few dollars of fine? Pay it and move on. Yet, bear in mind that the payment of fines in the Dayak community is never intended to be evaluated for its monetary value and that the amount represents the importance attached to the transgression.

Living in a multi-ethnic community with diverse cultures, customs, and traditions, we all — the Iban, Bidayuh, Orang Ulu, Chinese, Malay, and Melanau — must learn to respect each other's adat, custom, and tradition.

The Dayak are peaceful people, and as such, there will be nothing more than an expression of displeasure at this bad display of judgement. But mind you, if the same disrespect is shown to the Malay or the Chinese community, one can be assured that there will be demonstrations here and there, demanding the 'heads' of the perpetrator (figuratively speaking).

We Dayak are weak politically and economically, so you can disrespect us and our culture today and tomorrow, and you will get away with it.

Yet, remember you are not desecrating us but our 'gods' by your disrespectful acts. So we leave it to the people of Panggau Libau to deal with recalcitrant people who desecrate us, our culture, and our 'gods'.

It is sad that the keepers of the Dayak adat, customs, and traditions, such as the Temenggong, Pemanca, and Penghulu, have not made their opinions known.

A few Iban Temenggong have been contacted and have yet to provide their verdicts on the matter. But then again, the individuals involved are important and powerful men in Sarawak politics. Thus the Temenggong, Pemanca, and Penghulu who are appointed by their government could have a fear of repercussions on their positions.

To that, I say, "Shame on the Temenggong, Pemanca, and Penghulu."

What is even sadder is the fact that the Dayak themselves are divided on the issue.

Some are of the opinion that the act is inappropriate to the occasion. But, at the same time, a huge number consider it part of the merry-making entertainment, which is also part of Gawai, a time of celebration.

The latter misses the argument. If such an act of merry-making is fine, I think it would be much more fun to import some Middle Eastern belly dancers to rouse the Gawai crowd. They would easily outdo the Las Vegas showgirls touted by some netizens supporting the controversial Gawai do.

It is noted that an Iban Temenggong from the Sibu area where the act was committed, Temenggong Stanley Gramong Bandar, recently issued a weak statement not amounting to a reprimand.



Branch chairman of Sarawak Dayak National Union, Chambai Lindong, also issued a non-committal position by explaining what and where such acts would have been more appropriately displayed. — DayakDaily

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