



Dr Sim (front, third left), Shankar (back, second right) and others gather in the latter's chambers following the Zoom hearing.

# Covid-19 food aid suit: Chong ordered to pay RM500,000



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**KUCHING:** The High Court here ordered Sarawak Democratic Action Party (DAP) chairman Chong Chieng Jen to pay a total of RM500,000 in damages and costs to Deputy Premier Datuk Amar Dr Sim Kui Hian in a defamation suit concerning the allocation of Covid-19 food aid funds in 2020.

Judge Datuk Dr Alwi Abdul Wahab ruled in proceedings held via Zoom that Dr Sim as the plaintiff had successfully established his claim, while defendant Chong failed in his defence.

The court further dismissed a counterclaim filed by Chong, holding that statements by Dr Sim that were published in articles, in which the Deputy Premier stated that Chong was 'carrying bags of rice merely for show', were not defamatory.

The court ruled that the articles did not carry any words capable of bearing a defamatory meaning.

Accordingly, the court awarded RM350,000 as general and aggravated damages for defamation, RM50,000 as general damages for malicious falsehood, and RM100,000 as total costs to Dr Sim.

In 2020, Dr Sim, who is Batu Kawah assemblyman, filed the suit against Chong, who is Stampin MP and Padungan assemblyman, for alleging that he had failed to manage food aid worth RM800,000 meant for four state constituencies held by the opposition at the time: Padungan, Batu Lintang, Pending, and Kota Sentosa.

Several Sarawak DAP leaders, including Chong, were alleged to have defamed Dr Sim in newspapers.

According to earlier reports, Dr Sim, who is Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) president, said all state government food aid funds were channelled to the divisional disaster management committees and not to the

service centres of state assemblymen.

He maintained that Sarawak DAP leaders had repeatedly made false allegations through social media and the press with the intention of tarnishing his reputation and accusing him of abusing his position.

Dr Sim was represented by lawyers Datuk Shankar Ram Asnani, Sidharth Shankar Asnani and Shemira Adzhar, while Chong was represented by lawyers Michael Kong, Chong Siew Chiang, Brenda Chong, and Sharon Lo.

Meanwhile, Chong in a statement said he would "definitely" file an appeal against yesterday's court ruling.

"The comments in question made by me were based on an official directive issued by the state government, which is discriminatory in nature and to this day has not been officially revoked.

"I am of the view that my comment was a fair criticism against the state government's discriminatory policy and will stand by my position," he said.