

# Standing Order on Friday sitting hours approved

NST 31 OCT 1981

THE Dewan Rakyat today approved an amendment to the House Standing Orders which changed the Friday sitting hours to 3 p.m. until 7 p.m. instead of from 2.30 p.m. until 6.30 p.m.

The amendment to Standing Order 12(1) was one of several proposed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad which were passed unanimously.

The new sitting hours for Friday would take effect from next week.

Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir said the new sitting hours for Friday would allow Muslim Members of Parliament to attend sitting in time after performing their Friday prayers.

The amendment to Standing Order 24(2) provided that questions from Members who were absent were left towards the end after all questions by those present in the House had been answered.

The Prime Minister said the amendment was aimed at giving priority

to Members who were present to ask their questions.

During the debate on the motion, Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang regretted that answers to some oral questions were being withheld from Parliament and MPs.

He said that answers to oral questions marked down for oral answers were all prepared for the day they had been set down, and even if the question was not answered orally during Question Time, the Minister or his Deputy had the answer with him.

"All he needs to do is to send his answer to Parliament, with a copy extended to the MP who asked the question.

The Member for Petaling also suggested that the daily Parliamentary meeting hours be lengthened to allow for more time for MPs to take part in debates, especially debate on the Budget.

Mr P. Patta (DAP-Menglembu) asked whether answers to ques-

tions by an MP who had been granted leave from the sessions could be printed by the press or likewise, circulated freely by officers from the department or ministry questioned.

Speaker Tan Sri Syed Nasir Ismail interjected that it was a ruling that in such an event, the MP who had been granted leave should not be considered as having taken part in any of the proceedings unless he had informed the Speaker that he had terminated his leave.

As such, none of his questions should be regarded either for written replies or otherwise, the Speaker added.

In winding up the debate, the Prime Minister said Opposition Members had been given considerable opportunity to take part in debates in the House.

He believed that if the Opposition were to rule the country, Barisan Nasional Members might not be given as much opportunity to participate in the debates.

On the claim by the Opposition Leader that amendments to the Standing Orders were made on an ad hoc basis, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir said the Government reviewed the Standing Orders from time to time and suggested the changes if they were thought necessary.

On the attitudes of ministries in not making Parliamentary replies to questions available promptly to MPs, the Prime Minister said he could easily change the attitudes of Government officers and backbenchers, "but it is the attitude of the Opposition Members that I cannot change."