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## Cabinet concerned over head count of MPs in the House

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Cabinet is concerned over the New Straits Times' daily head count of "MPs in the House" in its Dewan Rakyat page as the figures could confuse readers.

Barisan Nasional secretary-general Datuk Mohamed Rahmat said today the head count done by NST since the Dewan Rakyat's sitting on March 25 did not take into consideration the MPs who were in the Parliament building.

"Some of the MPs could be in the Parliament lobby, the chamber or in their respective offices in the Parliament.

"The lobby is an important place to be in as many heated discussions relating to Bills take place there.

"The MPs would then bring into the Dewan Rakyat the points discussed in the lobby," he told reporters at the lobby.

MPs could also listen in to the debates or discussions in the Dewan Rakyat from their offices via an audio link.

Mohamed said it was not necessary for the MPs to be in the Dewan Rakyat at all times and in any Parliament in the world, not all the MPs were always there.

He cited the example of the Parliament sessions in England which are televised live over the British Broadcasting Corporation.

"Many of the seats were empty except during question-and-answer time which was viewed as an important moment to question government policies."

If ever the number of MPs in the House fell below its quorum of 26 (there are 192 MPs), the Parliament secretary at the directive of the Speaker, will ring the bell calling the MPs in.

"A Dewan Rakyat session would be suspended if the number of MPs in the House fell below the quorum," Mohamed explained.

The NST head count of MPs in the House is done at 2.30pm which is when the sitting begins, 4.30pm and 6.15pm.

The sitting ends at 6.30pm.

When asked recently to comment on the statistics published by the NST on the attendance of MPs, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said although MPs were not seated in the House, they constantly kept in touch with proceedings.

Dr Mahathir had said that the statistics published were an indicator and was glad that NST was doing it.

Mohamed said: "There is a whip, a deputy whip and Minister in attendance to make sure that everything in the House is in order."

He said BN was satisfied with its MPs' attendance and a daily head count was done by its office.

In the event an MP failed to attend a sitting, he or she had to give a written explanation to the BN office, he added.

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