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Club to monitor MPs (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - The Backbenchers' Club, previously reticent about absenteeism of MPs during Parliament sittings, is now taking stock of the problem by planning a self-monitoring mechanism.

This means that from the next session in February, the performance of Barisan Nasional MPs will be monitored and recorded by a committee to be set up by the club.

A quarterly report will then be compiled and submitted to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is BN chairman.

The club's president Datuk Jamaluddin Mohd Jarjis said besides monitoring MPs' attendance in Parliament, the committee would also monitor their articulation during each sitting and the quality of the debates.

The move, Jamaluddin said, would ensure that BN MPs performed according to the benchmark set by Dr Mahathir.

It also comes at a time when MPs' attendance is under close scrutiny. The Dewan Rakyat sat for four days last week - the first time after the 10th general election.

The New Straits Times has, since March 25, 1997, published a roll-call of members in the House at three different times during the day's proceedings, but many MPs, including Backbenchers Club members had questioned the motive.

Former Backbenchers Club president Ruhanie Ahmad had once said the tally was unfair and did not reflect the real situation.

BN secretary-general Datuk Seri Mohamed Rahmat had also said the head count 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. MPs can also listen in to the debates or discussions in the lobby or their offices via an audio link."

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

However, Jamaluddin admitted some BN MPs were inactive and complacent. He said it was high time the MPs got their act together and were prepared to respond to the changing demands and needs of the people.

Rural Development Minister Datuk Azmi Khalid said all ministers had been directed by Dr Mahathir to attend Parliament if they did not have any ministerial duties or functions. He said Ministers and Deputy Ministers needed to juggle with paperwork in the office and deal with other ministerial functions before rushing back to Parliament.

However, he said, at any one time, if the ministers could not attend the sitting, then the deputy or parliamentary secretary would take his place.

"It is high time that we look into this as it will ensure that each MP fulfils his duty as promised to the people during the campaign."

MP for Tambun Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah, who is the club secretary, said MPs should rise to people's expectations by fulfilling their parliamentary duties and responsibilities as well as maintaining parliamentary decorum.

He said having a monitoring system would create transparency among the MPs as their performance could be seen by all.

"MPs should strive at being performance-oriented in Parliament.

"As many of them are professionals and highly qualified, they need no reminders to do their homework well and be knowledgeable on current issues

before raising questions and debating issues."

In addition, he said, they must look into the broader perspective and give greater consideration to national needs and aspirations.

"With the new millennium, MPs must be prepared to carry on a compelling debate and speak in a manner which is both interesting and substantive."

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