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Show up, MPs told (HL)

Shareem Amry

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Malaysians today sent a loud and clear message to all Members of Parliament with a history of irregular attendance at Parliament: "Show up and do your job."

Although the ongoing Dewan Rakyat session only started a few days ago, it is already clear that many MPs' attendance records are erratic.

Members of the public polled by the New Straits Times today said the time had come for MPs to clean up their act.

All respondents expressed disappointment with MPs who did not take the trouble to attend parliamentary debates as it seemed to indicate a lack of interest in fulfilling their responsibilities.

Their comments came in the wake of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's warning this morning to Barisan Nasional MPs that they would be dropped at the next general election if they did not perform well. The Prime Minister said BN officials were watching the MPs closely, especially with regard to attendance and debates.

"Besides the secretary to the Parliament, we also keep records. We keep note of how long they (the MPs) were in the hall, whether they took part in the debate, how prepared they were for the debate and so on.

"In the end, we will report this to their voters," he told reporters who had asked about the long-standing struggle to get a full house at the Dewan Rakyat.

Attending debates in Parliament, the poll respondents said, was essential as it kept the wakil rakyat informed of the latest political issues and gave them the opportunity to voice their constituents' concerns. The respondents said MPs should not take their duties lightly and that there was no excuse for irregular attendance, especially as Parliament only convened several times a year.

Those interviewed said the public was largely helpless in rectifying the matter and called on the Government to take disciplinary steps.

Among the measures suggested were strict guidelines for the MPs to follow and a disciplinary committee that would be responsible for monitoring each MP's attendance record.

Some called on dissatisfied constituents to "send clear messages" to the parties concerned either by writing to the party directly or through the media, stating that they were not happy with their MP.

They said the threat of not voting again for a particular candidate or the MP's party could be strong enough to push them to ensure only good MPs were fielded.