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Parliament-Roundup

DEWAN RAKYAT FREE OF 'LACK OF QUOROM' PROBLEM DURING WEEK ONE

By: Mohd Nasir Yusof

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 22 (Bernama) -- The first week of the Dewan Rakyat's Budget session was promising in at least one area -- attendance by the honourable members.

Not once during the four days of meeting was there a lack of quorum (less than 26 of the 193 MPs present) unlike in previous sessions.

The credit goes to the Prime Minister. His warning to Barisan Nasional (BN) MPs that their attendance, or rather non-attendance, would be recorded has been effective.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is BN chairman, had issued the warning during the pre-council meeting of BN MPs just before the start of the session on Monday.

He told the MPs that their attendance record would be a factor in determining if they would be retained in the next general election.

Backbenchers Club president Datuk Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis said the MPs' participation in, and quality of, debates should also be among the factors to be considered.

Dr Jamaluddin added that the Opposition, with 45 MPs, were equally responsible in ensuring that the quorum was always met.

DAP secretary-general Kerk Kim Hock, however, thinks that the government MPs have a bigger responsibility in this matter.

"Morally all the MPs should be present in the house all the time, but the main responsibility lies with the government MPs because the house is conducting government business," he told Bernama.

Another matter that affected MPs during the week was the 10 percent rise in their allowances proposed in the Members of Parliament (Remuneration) (Amendment) Bill.

It is understood that BN MPs, who had a discussion in Parliament on the matter, want the Government to review the amount of increase.

Under the bill, the monthly allowance of the MPs are to be increased from RM4,890 to RM5,379 with senators' allowance going up from RM3,090 to RM3,399.

Opposition MPs too are not fully satisfied with the bill, saying MPs should also be given allocations to employ clerks, assistants and researchers.

"I hope DAP supporters will understand why we won't reject (the allowance rise). For full-time politicians especially, any rise in the allowance will help them in discharging their duties as they are now using their own money for the people," said Kerk.

Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Dr Shafie Mohamed Salleh told Bernama that the MPs should be grateful that they are given a 10 percent increase which he said showed that the BN Government cared about their welfare.

The week also saw a group of non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives holding a peaceful gathering outside Parliament to among others protest against the Internal Security Act (ISA).

The group sought to enter Parliament to submit a memorandum signed by 71 NGOs addressed to all MPs, but only managed to hand it over to Leader of the Opposition Datuk Fadzil Noor.

Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail, in a written explanation to Kerk on the matter, said he had received a letter from the human rights group Suaram asking him to distribute the memorandum to all MPs.

He said he had asked the secretary to Parliament to inform Suaram that

it was not the speaker's duty to distribute memoradums to MPs.

Debate in the house during the four days of meeting was centered mainly on the Child's Bill and Common Gaming Houses (Amendment) Bill both of which were approved by the MPs.

The Dewan Rakyat continues its session on Monday.

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