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No playing truant, MPs told (HL)

Ashraf Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Cabinet has noted that some Barisan Nasional Members of Parliament were not even present in the Dewan Rakyat to ask questions which they had earlier submitted in writing.

Describing this as "a dereliction of duty", Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today told the BN MPs to stop playing truant and carry out their duties responsibly.

Abdullah, who is the BN whip, said this in a circular dated Oct 30 which was distributed to the BN MPs in the Dewan Rakyat today.

He said the Cabinet at its weekly meeting on Oct 25 was informed that there were some MPs who were not even present in the House when their questions came up.

He added that MPs should give priority to their duties as the people's representatives and attend all sittings religiously.

Abdullah said it was the duty of elected representatives to attend Parliament sittings and to participate in its activities so that the problems of the people could be brought up and attended to.

Under Dewan Rakyat proceedings, MPs are required to submit written questions to the Parliament secretary earlier and should be present to ask the questions when they come up during the one-hour question time. Otherwise, the questions will not be answered.

BN Backbenchers' Club president Datuk Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis when contacted today confirmed that the circular was sent to all BN MPs.

"As BN whip, he gave us certain instructions and advice, and we will abide by them," he said.

Jamaluddin, who is MP for Rompin, however, said the MPs were more responsible now.

The circular, however, made no mention of whether action would be taken against MPs who were absent without valid reasons.

On Oct 16, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also BN chairman, said BN MPs who failed to attend Parliament sittings without valid reasons might not be fielded in the next general election.

Absenteeism among MPs had been a perennial problem during previous Parliament sittings, sometimes leading to adjournment of proceedings due to lack of quorum.

The Opposition had also brought up the issue on several occasions. The DAP had in the past kept records of attendance of some MPs, including Ministers.

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