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## Stopping MP absenteeism

MEMBERS of the Dewan Rakyat are honourable people and we call them Yang Berhormat or YB. They are our lawmakers and they decide on the path the country should take and they decide on the policies according to which we must play our small roles in this nation.

Thus they are expected to be responsible persons and they are expected to discharge their duties and responsibilities with sincerity and honesty. Their voters, if they still remember them, expect nothing less of them. They, therefore, must remember the promises they made when appealing to the people to elect them.

They showed their good side then and promised, among other things, to work hard for their constituencies. And that was only at the end of last year.

But it seems many have forgotten the promises they made. It must seem to them like a distant past. Surely the least that is expected of them is for them to warm their seats whenever the Dewan Rakyat is in session.

Surely that is where they are expected to be to debate, to air their views and to represent the voters who put them there. Maybe they are elsewhere doing the same thing. Such that the Government pews are so empty that echoes abound. But isn't the Dewan Rakyat the right place for debates on national matters?

The situation must have been so bad for Prime Minister and BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to tick them off himself for their absence.

What is worse is that this is not the first time that the issue of absentee MPs has been brought up as the same problem was raised a few years ago but obviously some of the MPs are not paying attention to what is expected of them in attending Parliamentary sittings.

The Prime Minister is rightfully concerned with the state of affairs because it is detrimental to the smooth functioning of parliamentary democracy if MPs are frequently absent from parliamentary sittings and what is more disturbing is that the people's respect for their elected representatives could erode over time if the absenteeism persists and is not checked.

Those who have been constantly absent without valid reasons should immediately change and make it a point to be present at the current Dewan Rakyat session which began on Monday and ends on Dec 20. It is saddening that the issue of absentee MPs is more prevalent now. It reflects the indifference of some MPs to their heavy responsibility as lawmakers.

If they do not even bother to turn up at the sittings, they have failed themselves as MPs and neglected their duties and responsibilities to the electorate who put them there. Dr Mahathir's reminder is a timely wake-up call to these MPs of what is expected of them after having been elected to the House.

Time is wasted whenever in the middle of a debate on a Bill, the members of the Opposition point out to the Speaker that there is no quorum. The Dewan had to be adjourned. The Opposition is happy to do this as it demonstrates the disinterestedness of the government members with the Bill which is more often than not presented by the Government.

Due to absence of many members, especially government members, some Bills just scraped through. Imagine a situation - it has not happened yet - when a Government Bill is defeated, simply because there are not enough Barisan Nasional MPs in the Dewan. And it may well happen considering that

there are now 45 Opposition MPs in the august House.

Thus, the Prime Minister's ire is understandable. He has warned that those who are frequently absent might not be renominated to contest in the next general election.

Maybe Dewan sittings should be telecast live.

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