

Mahathir, backbenchers discuss attendance and lack of quorum in dewan

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By **Ferida Abdul Kudhus**

PETALING JAYA, Fri: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had a one-hour closed-door meeting with backbenchers today, and one of the subjects raised was attendance in parliament.

The backbenchers sought the meeting, which was held at Putrajaya, after a dinner meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on Wednesday.

Larut MP Datuk Raja Ahmad Zainuddin Raja Omar said that besides other subjects, the prime minister touched on the issue of quorum in the dewan rakyat, where he had said that it is the responsibility of the MPs to attend the house sittings.

"He also wanted to know the MPs' problems in the development of their constituencies," he added.

Tampin MP Shahziman Abu Mansor said the prime minister advised the MPs to try to attend the dewan rakyat sittings as much as possible, although he understood that some of

them have other pressing matters to attend to.

"He asked us to arrange the attendance in such a way that the dewan would not look so empty," he said.

Subang MP Tan Sri K.S. Nijhar said the meeting, which was sought by the backbenchers, was to catch up on current issues and is normal when parliament is in session.

The meeting touched on the Sept 11 incident in the United States.

"We discussed the incident and how we should go about handling it," he said.

Nijhar said the prime minister also talked about Malaysia's foreign policy, which was praised by other countries.

Serdang MP Datuk Yap Pian Hon said that apart from being briefed on Budget 2002, the MPs were also asked to make frequent visits to their constituencies.

A dialogue was also held which discussed the upgrading of the development machinery, he added.

The prime minister had, in November last year, installed closed-circuit TV in his office in Putrajaya that gives him live coverage of parliament sittings.