

## **One-day Parliamentary sitting set to be a costly affair**

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Opposition MPs are expecting the one-day sitting of Parliament on May 18 to be a costly affair given the hotel, food and travel allowances allocated to the 222 parliamentarians to attend the truncated gathering.

This is particularly the case for the 57 MPs from Sarawak (31), Sabah (25) and Labuan (one) who have to fly to the federal capital to attend the sitting which is set to end just after the opening address by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

Furthermore, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, MPs must arrive in KL a few days earlier to have themselves tested and certified fit to attend, which will incur more costs.

Bandar Kuching MP Dr Kelvin Yii told Malaysiakini: "My flights alone come to over RM2,000. On normal days we can claim business class, but that price is for an economy ticket because there are no other flights.

"For hotels, I can claim up to RM400 per night. And due to the lack of flights I will have to stay in KL at least eight days," he said.

This means hotel claims of RM3,200 for Yii who pointed out that the one-day sitting is going to result in substantial costs to the taxpayer.

"Additionally, my food allowance is RM100 per day," added Yii, who is also entitled to a meeting allowance of RM300.

This would mean that an eight-day stay for Yii to attend the brief Parliamentary sitting will come up to over RM6,000.

Fuziah Salleh is MP for Kuantan and has different circumstances. She is driving to KL and is therefore eligible for transport claims of RM0.85 per km plus toll charges.

For a roundtrip of 230km, that comes to over RM390 in petrol and RM44 in toll claims.

"I stay in my own house in KL so I don't claim the hotel allowance, just a lodging stipend which comes to RM90 or so," said Fuziah, who is also eligible to claim the RM300 meeting allowance and the RM100 daily food allowance.

Thus her claims - including the early trip for the Covid-19 testing at Parliament probably amounts to just over RM1,000 for the short sitting.

Yii's party colleague Kasthuri Patto is driving down from Batu Kawan, Penang and has a journey of 342km and toll charges of RM55 each way. Claims for her journey will amount to RM690.

"I'm still weighing my options whether to drive back up in between the health screening at Parliament and the sitting," said Kasthuri who stays in a hotel when in the capital.

"The room allowance is RM400. If there is anything more, the difference is borne by the MP," said Kasthuri, adding that she is very disappointed that there will not be any debates in Parliament on May 18.

The total cost for her to attend is approximately RM2,000.

Kasturi and Fuziah are among an estimated 140 MPs who are based in Peninsular Malaysia but will have to travel to KL for the meet.

Kepong MP Lim Lip Eng, however, is a KL-based MP and said that his presence in Parliament is not going to be so taxing financially on the taxpayer.

"MPs who live less than a radius of 32km from Parliament are not entitled to these claims. So KL MPs can't claim" he said.

Petaling MP Maria Chin Abdullah is another who lives within the radius and doesn't claim a special allowance for the sitting.

"Hotel and transport allowances are only for outstation MPs.

"All MPs have a general monthly transport allowance of about RM1,800 to pay for petrol and toll. Those in the Klang Valley will claim from these allowances," she said, adding that outstation MPs are only given the extra allowance of RM300 when they attend sittings and it is not on a monthly basis

There are 10 Kuala Lumpur MPs and an estimated 10-12 Selangor MPs whose constituencies are within a 32km radius from Parliament.

The one-day sitting has already been the source of much controversy with many MPs led by DAP veteran Lim Kit Siang calling for a virtual session to be held instead.

Furthermore, while Dewan Rakyat Speaker Mohamad Ariff Mohd Yusof accepted a no-confidence motion against Muhyiddin and former minister Liew Vui Keong

submitted an emergency motion to extend the sitting to eight days, the day's agenda was suddenly shortened to just the opening address with no motions up for debate.

Opposition parties have also said that the last-minute replacement of Parliament secretary Riduan Rahmat just days before the May 18 sitting was a worrying development as it created a perception of "undue influence" by the government over Parliament.

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