

MPs' pay could double under parliamentary overhaul proposal
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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 10 — Members of Parliament could see their pay double under a proposal to restructure Parliament aimed at restoring total independence to the country's legislative arm.

The Malaysian Insider understands a "parliamentary review committee" formed last year has suggested raising MPs' remuneration to between RM30,000 and RM35,000, inclusive of allowances, which is more than double the present estimated RM12,000 the lawmakers are entitled to.

The nine-member bipartisan committee, chaired by Deputy Speaker Datuk Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar (picture), has also suggested expanding MPs' parliamentary powers and privileges and reviving the Parliamentary Services Act (PSA), which was repealed in 1992.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who is also finance minister, had alluded to the possible pay hike when tabling the Budget 2012 proposals on Friday.

Wan Junaidi confirmed with The Malaysian Insider that the committee submitted three draft Bills — the PSA Bill, Houses of Parliament (Privileges and Powers) Amendment Bill and Members of Parliament (Remuneration) Amendment Bill — to Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Mulia, Senate President Tan Sri Abu Zahar Nika Ujang and minister in charge of parliamentary affairs Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz within the past two weeks.

The Santubong MP, however, would not disclose details on the suggested pay hike for MPs, saying the matter should first be deliberated by the trio before they are presented for further review to all elected representatives and later proposed to the government.

"We have agreed that this should be embargoed until further notice. This is still in a very early stage," Wan Junaidi said when contacted.

But he urged The Malaysian Insider to stress that Malaysian MPs are among the world's lowest-paid elected representatives with salaries equivalent to lawmakers in Christmas Island and Fiji.

"You can hint that we are among the lowest paid in the world. We are four times lower than Indonesia and Thailand... and there is no need to even compare us to Singapore," he said.

MPs' salaries have been revised five times in 1992, 1997, 2001, 2002 and 2005 since the Members of Parliament (Remuneration) Bill was enacted in 1980.

In the 2005 amendment, their basic salaries increased from RM5,916.90 in 2002 to RM6,508.59, not inclusive of other benefits such as a RM1,200 driver allowance.

Last year, DAP MP Anthony Loke raised furore over the failure to raise MP salaries simultaneously with the Senate President's and Dewan Rakyat Speaker's allowances, which saw a hike in entertainment allowances from RM7,000 to RM9,680; a one-off appointment

allowance of RM10,000; an increase of RM1,000 for both their housing and rental allowances, from RM3,000 to RM4,000; an annual housing maintenance allowance of RM10,000; and other increases.

On the proposal to expand MPs' parliamentary powers and privileges, Wan Junaidi pointed out the legislation was enacted in 1952 and only underwent one amendment in the following year.

"It was never touched after that. Imagine, this Act was in place even before Merdeka... is it still valid under present circumstances? Certainly it requires some changes," he said.

Referring to Pandikar, Abu Zahar and Nazri as the "panel of advisers", Wan Junaidi said the trio has been offered an estimated one-month period from October 6 to study the committee's suggestions and add further input.

"The panel will decide whether there is a need for further amendments and, in addition, whether to agree that the suggestions should be presented to the MPs before passing it on to the government," he said.

Many lawmakers had previously lamented the 1992 repeal of the PSA, saying that in line with the principle of separation of powers, the law should be restored to return total independence to Parliament to conduct its own administration, staffing and financing, instead of reporting to the executive arm of the government like the Prime Minister's Department.

Wan Junaidi said efforts to reform Parliament had kicked off since 1994 but hit many snags over the years due the refusal of past Speakers exercise their "inherent authority" to form the parliamentary review committee.

He said the committee was formed outside of the Standing Orders, which currently only provides for five permanent committees: Select Committee, House Committee, Committee of Privileges, Public Accounts Committee and the Standing Orders Committee.

"We did not have a Speaker who wanted to intervene... I spoke to the previous ones but they would not place importance in this. But Tan Sri Abu Zahar, using his inherent authority that allows for such moves to be made for the good of the House, gave the instruction to form the committee last year.

"We previously did not have enough money, experts, assistants and researchers in the field to moot these changes. But today, we also have a former draftsman from the Attorney-General's office to be with us," he said.

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