

Sitting is timely and crucial, says Prof



By MARTIN CARVALHO

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History in the making: This is the first time that Dewan Rakyat is convening since adjourning 'sine die' in December last year after passing Budget 2021. — FAIHAN GHANI/The Star

PETALING JAYA: The historic five-day special sitting of Dewan Rakyat begins today under a cloud of dramatic surge in daily Covid-19 infections, which have gone over 17,000 cases.

The sitting, which is expected to be heated with MPs questioning the ministers and the government on measures against the Covid-19 and

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Political analyst Prof Dr Sivamurugan Pandian of Universiti Sains Malaysia expects fireworks as there have been recent calls from the Opposition to allow for voting after the briefing sessions by the government on a gamut of issues, including the National Recovery Plan (NRP) and vaccination.

“The sitting is timely and crucial for both the Opposition and the government to show consensus in focusing on the needs of the people, rather than politicising issues,” he said in an interview.

Although no motions are set to be tabled for voting, Sivamurugan said leeway would be given for MPs to raise questions and debate following the government’s briefing.

“Without debate, the sitting would be seen by the MPs as just a ‘lecture session’ by the ministers.

“At least, by listening to the lawmakers during the debates, there could be some improvement to the government’s handling of the pandemic,” he said.

However, he said MPs must be clear on what they want.

“Is it health and economic recovery for the nation or recovery from their own political crisis?” he said.

The five-day special sitting from today to Thursday and on Aug 2 will begin with Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin briefing the House on the NRP.

Also scheduled to brief the House are Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba on the efforts to combat the pandemic, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Khairy Jamaluddin on the national vaccination programme and Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz on the economic aid packages.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob has also been tasked with briefing lawmakers on the Emergency Proclamation and related ordinances.

Dewan Rakyat Speaker Datuk Azhar Azizan Harun had assured lawmakers that they would be allowed time to raise questions following each briefing session.

This comes after Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said that some MPs would attend the briefing but might leave ahead of time.

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This is the first time that Dewan Rakyat is convening since adjourning sine die in December last year after passing Budget 2021.

Dewan Rakyat was supposed to have met in March for the opening of the First Meeting of the Fourth Session of the 14th Parliament this year but this was suspended following the Emergency Proclamation on Jan 12, which is set to end on Aug 1.

Last month, Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Riayatuddin Mustafa Billah Shah decreed that Parliament should convene as soon as possible to allow lawmakers to discuss and debate the Emergency Proclamation and the NRP.

International Islamic University's Prof Dr Nik Ahmad Kamal Nik Mahmud said the special sitting was being held to fulfil Article 150(3) of the Federal Constitution for the Emergency Proclamation to be "laid" before the Parliament.

"It looks like the proclamation will only be laid before MPs in Dewan Rakyat without a vote being taken on whether to annul the proclamation. This is because the proclamation will automatically lapse on Aug 1 in the absence of a motion to annul it," he said.

He said this might have been done to avoid the proclamation having to be debated and put to the vote in the House as it would lapse within the coming week anyway.

He said, however, the related Emergency ordinances would continue to be in force for the next six months as provided for under Article 150(7) of the Constitution.

Prof Nik Ahmad said despite criticisms and objections over the absence of voting during the special sitting, it was still a good step forward by the government to explain their actions and plans for the nation in Parliament.

Meanwhile, not all 220 MPs are expected to attend the special sitting following reports that some 35 individuals, including several MPs, had tested positive for the virus following mandatory Covid-19 pre-screening.

Among those who said they were under self-quarantine are Umno president and Bagan Datuk MP Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Higher Education deputy minister and Nibong Tebal MP Datuk Mansor Othman and Tanjong MP Chow Kon Yeow, who is Penang Chief Minister.

All 72 reporters allowed to cover the sitting have also been required to undergo swab tests and will need to be vaccinated.

All instances and evidence of the sitting will also be taken by official media only.

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