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Parliament-Time  
MEMBERS IN A RUSH TO DEBATE 2003 BUDGET

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 3 (Bernama) -- Today was the last of the eight days allotted for debate of the 2003 Budget, and this led to members of the Dewan Rakyat tackling the subject in rapid-fire fashion.

This was because they were given 10 minutes each to debate the Budget which was tabled by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also the Finance Minister, on Sept 20.

Those who were allowed to speak today made full use of the opportunity.

During the earlier part of the debate session last week, the 10-minute time limit was not imposed, a situation which saw some members making long speeches touching on various matters.

Those who spoke then could even afford to let other members interrupt their speeches to seek clarification, and this at times caused a war of words among members.

However, today's session saw speakers concentrating fully on the task at hand, and most of them were reading out speeches and not debating in the true sense of the word.

Due to time constraint, the MPs also delivered their speeches faster than usual, sometimes making it difficult for journalists to understand the debate.

The members were also "stingy" with their time because they refused to give way to others wishing to get clarification.

Datuk Mohamad Ali Hassan (BN-Tebrau), at the outset of his speech, told Deputy Speaker Datuk Muhammad Abdullah, who was chairing the session, that he would not allow anyone to interrupt him.

Ignoring pleas from his "closest neighbour" Datuk Mohamad Aziz (BN-Sri Gading), who stood up four times seeking permission to cut in, Mohamad Ali said: "Sorry, Datuk, I don't have enough time. Furthermore, I don't want to lose track (of my speech),"

This was also the stand adopted by Datuk Napsiah Omar (BN-Kuala Pilah).

Responding to a request by Ismail Noh (PAS-Pasir Mas) to interrupt her, she said any discussion on her speech could be made over a cup of coffee outside the House.

Muhammad, when met by Bernama, said the person chairing the session could set a time limit for the debate if there were many members who wanted to speak.

Although eight days had been set aside for the debate, it was difficult for the chairman to impose a time limit in the first week because not all members who wanted to speak stood up then, he said.

"We also gave an opportunity and a longer time for certain leaders like the Opposition Leader to speak," he said.

A total of 70 members took part in the eight-day Budget debate.

-- BERNAMA

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