

Friendly gesture when PM 'meets' Anwar
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Beh Lih Yi

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim exchanged friendly eye contact in their first meeting, after 10 years, in Parliament yesterday during the tabling of Budget 2009.

Anwar was seen smiling at the premier who sat directly opposite him in the House about 15 metres away after the opposition leader took his seat shortly before the tabling of the budget began at 4pm.

budget 2009 290808 01Abdullah acknowledged the gesture as he looked at Anwar. His deputy Najib Abdul Razak, who sat beside Abdullah, however did not make eye contact with Anwar.

At this juncture, Penang chief minister Lim Guan Eng (DAP-Bagan) walked towards Anwar's seat and teased him as to whether he could actually see Abdullah since the Dewan Rakyat secretary who sat in the middle of the chamber could have blocked his view.

First budget since 1997

Anwar however did not meet with either Abdullah or Najib outside the House.

The opposition leader and Abdullah missed each other at the Parliament lobby earlier by a mere 30 seconds. Anwar entered the chamber just as Abdullah arrived.

Anwar has been on a warpath with the government's two top guns, especially Najib, claiming that they were responsible for hatching the political conspiracy against him with the fresh sodomy charge.

Their first meeting in Parliament today was a keen pointer as Anwar has repeatedly stressed in the recently-concluded Permatang Pauh by-election campaign that he will 'watch' Abdullah during the budget, if he is elected.

Budget 2009 was the first for Anwar in 11 years. In 1997, Anwar presented Budget 1998 as finance minister.

Lighter moment in the House

There were also a few light moments in the House during Abdullah's 90-minute budget speech.

budget 2009 290808 06The premier had the House in stitches, including Anwar, when he read out the fourth paragraph of his speech which he touched on the spirit of solidarity, saying that it could only be tested during difficult times.

"There can be a lot of friends during good times, but a loyal and true friend during difficult times is not easy to find," Abdullah said as he looked across to the opposition bench.

Abdullah also took a swipe at the opposition when he inadvertently made a mistake when reading out his speech and said that he would like to read out the correct version.

Hearing the murmurs from the opposition MPs, he retorted: "Yes, sometimes we do make mistakes, but certain people who have made mistakes don't want to admit they are wrong."

Abdullah's announcement for free electricity for those who use less than RM20 per month also became a subject of taunting among the MPs.

Several opposition MPs including Dr Hatta Ramli were seen jeering at Puad Zarkashi (BN-Batu Pahat) who had previously described the Selangor state government's move to give free water as equivalent to wastage.

Towards the end of Abdullah's speech, he hit out at "certain quarters" for trying to destabilise the country by seizing power through illegal means.

Although he did not name anyone, it was obvious that he was referring to Anwar, who has consistently claimed he could topple the federal government with the defection of BN legislators by Sept 16.

As Abdullah mentioned that, he looked across the opposition bench while Anwar wore a smile on his face.

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