

Budget protest: House suspended for 2 hours
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The Dewan Rakyat proceedings was suspended for two hours following protests from the opposition bench over the additional figures tabled by Finance Minister Najib Abdul Razak to Budget 2009.

Deputy speaker Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar suspended proceedings until 2.30pm after the opposition refused to allow the Bill to reach the committee stage.

Several Pakatan Rakyat MPs led by Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim (PKR-Permatang Pauh) had earlier told Wan Junaidi that under Section 66 (15) of the Standing Orders, the House must be informed two days before the tabling of any amendments made to a Supply Bill.

The motion must also be distributed to all MPs, they added.

Speaking at a press conference later, the opposition leader and DAP stalwart Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Ipoh Timur) commended the decision by Wan Junaidi to adjourn the proceedings.

"It is a commendable and wise decision by the speaker to adjourn proceedings as there are many issues that require solving before it can be debated at the committee stage," said Anwar.

Yesterday, Pakatan MPs staged a walkout when Najib refused to allow the opposition to seek clarification over the RM7 billion stimulus package mentioned in his Budget 2009 ministerial winding up speech.

The MPs also saw red when Speaker Pandikar Amin Mulia backed the minister on this matter.

The absence of Pakatan MPs saw the Budget 2009 Supply Bill passed by the Dewan Rakyat unopposed.

Which bill was passed?

Commenting on this, Anwar asked: "But which bill was passed yesterday? Is it the budget presented by Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi or the budget with additional figures read out by Najib?"

Both Anwar and Lim reiterated that making fiscal amendments to the original budget presented by Abdullah was tantamount to a new budget and members of the Dewan must first be informed of the amendments before it is tabled for reading.

"When we talk about the national budget, every sen must be discussed and get the approval of the Dewan before it can be passed," said Lim.

Anwar described what happened yesterday as a 'dangerous sign' for the country as Najib, who will be taking over the premiership next March, had shown signs of being

'incompetent'.

"What he did, by clearly violating the rules of parliament, is a very dangerous sign for the country. This is a clear indication of the sheer incompetence of our deputy prime minister," he said.

Meanwhile, Kamarudin Jaffar (PAS-Tumpat) who was also present at the press conference described what Najib had done as a 'bad omen' for the country's future.

"He has already acted as a prime minister when he is only the deputy prime minister," he said.

Speaker clarifies

Reconvening the proceedings at 2:30pm, Pandikar told the Dewan Rakyat that he believed "there has been no element of a violation of the Standing Orders as raised by (Pakatan) members of parliament".

"Because of that, the motion of the MOF with the development expenditures contained in the Supply Bill 2009 is in order," he said.

However, said Pandikar, the RM7 billion that Najib announced would be injected into the economy was not part of the Budget 2009 tabled by Abdullah that had been debated at the policy level and would now be used as the basis for the debates at the committee stage.

"As far as I know, the RM7 billion mentioned constitute the steps to be taken by the government - if needed - in facing the economic crisis engulfing the world which, whether we want it or not, will affect Malaysia's economy.

"The said money, as we all know and were informed by the minister of finance, is the result of savings from oil subsidies," said Pandikar.

"What I was informed when I asked the parties responsible is that there is no change to the budget that has been debated. There is no change to the figures contained in the materials or documents that have been distributed before this and raised by Ipoh Timor," he said in reference to Lim.

Addressing concerns that Najib had tried to amend the budget tabled by Abdullah, and thereby seeking to get the 'revised' version passed "through the backdoor", Pandikar said: "Political rhetoric as to whether our economy will be adversely affected, whether the figures are accurate or not, whether or not the opposition said is right or not, or whether what the government is doing is right or not, is not an issue of parliament (regulations)."

"My question is whether regulations are truly followed and obeyed, because I understand this budget that is being discussed now is the most important. If it doesn't follow the Standing Orders, it is not constitutional, it is not valid, and it cannot be implemented.

"Believe me, this decision is made considering all aspects - the Federal Constitution of Malaysia and the Standing Orders," said Pandikar.

Clarifying further, Deputy Finance Minister Ahmad Husni Mohamad Hanadzlah reiterated that what will be presented at the committee level are figures that were tabled by the Prime

Minister on Aug 29.

"What the finance minister (Najib) did was for the sake of transparency. Just as he said that extraordinary times demand extraordinary measures, (this was done) so that people know that when the need arises, there will be the funds.

"If there is a need for more, we will table the motion for a supplementary budget in Parliament," he added.

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