

PM lambasts opposition for budget ruckus
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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi chided the opposition for the ruckus they created yesterday while his deputy Najib Abdul Razak was winding up the debate on the 2009 Budget.

He said the plans contained in Najib's winding-up speech would be of benefit to the people.

Najib yesterday announced a RM7 billion stimulus package to bolster the economy in face of a global financial crisis. The opposition staged a walkout halfway through his speech after he refused to answer their questions.

And this morning a protest by them resulted in the sitting being suspended for two hours.

"If the opposition had not walked out, they could have discussed the matter. What happened was, many of the things proposed were demands from the people that the government is aware of and is concerned about," Abdullah told a press conference at the Parliament building.

"Surely, that is a response that is good and can help people at this time. If they (opposition) did not go out, they would have been able to forward questions on how the RM7 billion - which is in the budget - will be used. This is part of the allocation from subsidies. It was taken from the subsidies, so why not use it!" said the premier.

Shirking the trust of the people

Abdullah also described the opposition's walkout as akin to shirking from the responsibility entrusted to them by the people.

"The opposition walkout is merely walking away from their responsibilities. They should not walk away from the supply bill, which is a very important bill.

"That bill details our budget for the year 2009. If they had not walked out yesterday, we would not have wasted time this morning (when the proceedings) had to be postponed to make sure there would not be any more confusion as to what is to be debated during the debates."

He also suggested that it is part of the opposition strategy, and cited the walkout when the DNA bill was read for the first time in August as an example.

Perhaps this time, he added, the opposition merely "did not want to hear what has been proposed by government to help the people."

"It looked as if they wanted to disturb, to heckle, the debates... A lot of time was wasted, actually."

He also denied that Najib had acted arrogantly in refusing to answer any questions during the winding-up speech until he had finished reading his speech.

"What he wanted to was to read fast what had been listed," said Abdullah. He also said he thought it was not necessary for the figures cited by Najib to have been provided earlier on to the opposition before it was voted on by MPs.

PM congratulates Obama

On the historic victory obtained by Barack Obama as the new American president today, Abdullah said that the reality of leaders being chosen regardless of race can happen anywhere.

"What happened in America today was not decided by Washington or any one group but by the American people themselves through the democratic process and elections that have existed for so long in America," he said.

Abdullah also hoped Obama will bring changes to international affairs.

"I say this in view of the great influence that the United States has on the fate of international issues and the conduct of international relations."

He also said he hoped Obama could address and bring about positive changes in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and Iran.

Speaking of US-Malaysian ties, Abdullah hoped for "a new era of more friendly relations" between the two countries.

"But it is also our wish that these relations be maintained on the basis of full respect for each other as sovereign countries, and that all aspects of the relations should be enhanced for the purpose of mutual benefits."

On US relations with Muslim countries and the Organisation of Islamic Conference, Abdullah said he hoped Obama would "be fair in dealing with the various groups, fair in dealing with the Muslims and Muslim countries."

"I think the solution to any problem requires that those involved - the peacemakers - must be fair, and not be leaning towards supporting one side or the other."

Obama's immediate concern should be to tackle the economic crisis that stemmed from the US, Abdullah added.