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Friendly rivalry at fuel duel

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Anwar and Shabery trade facts, pot-shots

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KUALA LUMPUR: Information Minister Datuk Ahmad Shabery Cheek took on PKR adviser Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in a rarely seen debate on live television last night.

The one-hour debate, entitled "Today we form the Government, tomorrow the fuel prices will go down" proceeded smoothly with both speakers backing their points with facts.

The event was organised by online news portal Agenda Daily and was broadcast live over TV9, Astro Awani and Bernama TV.

Invited to be the first speaker, Anwar started off by saying that fuel prices would be reduced by 50 sen a litre to alleviate the economic burden faced by the people if Pakatan Rakyat formed the Government tomorrow.

Anwar said it would only cost the Government RM5bil to bring down fuel prices by 50 sen.

He said RM2bil could be saved by reducing the country's electricity buffer of 40% to 20%, as the extra capacity only benefited independent power producers (IPP).

Anwar hit out at the recent increase in fuel prices, saying such drastic measures within a short period had pushed inflation up.

"It was said that while prices go drastically up, inflation levels would not rise. Who was the one who taught that economic theory?" he said.

In response to that point, Shabery stressed that the inflation faced now could not be attributed solely to fuel prices.

He said major oil producers such as Venezuela and Iran experienced higher inflation than Malaysia although their fuel prices were much lower.

"In Venezuela, inflation is 30%, while Iran is one of the eight nations worst hit by inflation.

"It is not just oil prices that have gone up, but



Rivals: Anwar and Shabery shaking hands after their debate.

food as well. Our rice is cheaper than Thailand and that is because of our policies.

"We do not have to demonstrate on the streets or organise improper concerts," he said.

On claims that as an oil producer, Malaysia stood to profit with from higher crude oil prices, Shabery said Malaysia was only a minor oil producer.

"In 2015, Malaysia will become a net importer of oil. By then, will we be forced to raise the price of fuel drastically?" he said.

Both Shabery and Anwar managed to squeeze in a few pot shots at each other.

Before leaving, Shabery told reporters that he was satisfied with the debate but would leave it to the Government to decide how he had performed.

Shabery had earlier said he would resign as Information Minister if he failed to defend the Government's fuel policy.

Anwar said he was disappointed that several personal attacks had been made on him.

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Fight over lock-in at fuel duel