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A budget too overwhelming for Najib's detractors

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AT the political front, the unveiling of the 2017 Budget yesterday was perhaps a tad too overwhelming for staunch critics of Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

From across the government bench, opposition parliamentarians from the Pakatan Harapan pact had resorted to incomprehensible taunts, childish acts of raising protest papers with words "Siapa MOI?" and, finally, staging a walkout from the august house without a clear reason of protest.

Save for Pas lawmakers, who had chosen to remain in the house, the others had behaved unprofessionally as elected representatives following their boorish exit.

Such a disposition was clearly motivated by political interests, rather than the sentiments of people who had voted them into office.

The conduct had left Pas members of parliament, including Kota Baru's Datuk Takiyuddin Hassan and Temerloh's Nasrudin Hassan, visibly irked as seen on live television. The polarity within the camp was not lost on the observers as well.

The walkout brings two questions to mind: Firstly, are they fit or committed to representing the people?



Secondly, are they familiar with the parliamentary system?

The latter is a ponder at a lost opportunity in raising pertinent questions to the prime minister, who is also the finance minister. The budget was presented for the purpose of debate, but the members of parliament from Pakatan Harapan had chosen to bluntly reject it.

It is undoubtedly a stark reminder of United States' Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump's belligerent approach against political rivals. The bigger picture on strengthening domestic economy is, apparently, too small for Pakatan Harapan to see.

Nevertheless, Najib was unperurbed and exuded confidence as he went about delivering his budget speech, and theatrics failed to sway him off track.

A little bird had told yours truly that during a meeting with editors in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday, Najib

was in an exuberant mood, generally due to the fact that some of his least popular policies such as the Goods and Services Tax, mooted to reaffirm the nation's economy, were bearing fruit.

Yesterday, Najib, for the first time, had brought along testimonials of his policies' success in forms of people from all walks of life; the much-celebrated Rio Paralympians, *tok batins* and Rela members, among others, were present in a show of strength.

He had described the 2017 Budget as a "commitment budget", which, true to its epithet, centred on furthering commitments made for this year's fiscal measures that, among others, ensured increase in affordability of homes and improving career prospects among civil servants.

Claims by detractors that it was an "election budget" was duly rubbished — it was not an overly friendly budget, which if it was, would do away with previously rebuked measures to generate revenues, or gross slashes in tax rates.

(As a side note, an "election budget", as it is commonly described with a conspiratorial tinge to win votes, is usually the ones unveiled by

the opposition in its yearly alternative version, often dotted with populist fiscal proposals).

Responses from stakeholders — the people — were encouraging and constructive. For example, a 32-year-old man from Seberang Prai, Mohamed Rafiz Mohamed Rahman, suggested that a one-stop centre should be set up to facilitate aid for those in the B40 group.

Hence, even at a glance, the opposition's behaviour yesterday was unmistakably disrespectful to parliamentary democracy, and especially to the very voters they represent. It further proved the lack of interest in extending the laymen's needs, as most seem only keen to propagate unsubstantiated allegations of scandals.

Sensibly, DAP, PKR and Parti Amanah Negara should ruminate on fielding parliamentary candidates who are responsible enough to understand and participate in parliamentary system and procedures.

Such overtures from Pakatan Harapan pact members have unfortunately revealed their skewed outlook — all government policies must be viewed cynically, and not through constructive lenses.