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Parliament-Debate/BM

DEFICIT BUDGET NOT SIGN OF GOVT'S WEAKNESS, DEWAN RAKYAT TOLD

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 30 (Bernama) -- A backbencher told the Dewan Rakyat sitting here today that the Budget 2003, despite being a deficit budget, was designed to boost the country's economic growth.

This was not a sign of the government's weakness, said Datuk Dr Jamaluddin Mohd Jarjis (BN-Rompin), adding that if such a budget was not formulated, the country's economic growth would not be as robust as expected.

"Firm fundamentals will generate stronger economy, enabling the government to develop the society," he said when debating the Budget 2003.

Jamaluddin was replying to Mohd Apandi Mohamad (PAS-Jeli) who had earlier questioned the effectiveness of deficit budgets which the government had tabled for six consecutive years.

Mohd Apandi had also quoted the statement by United States' Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan that deficit budgets should not be practised for more than three years as this indicated that a government was not able to formulate a healthy balance sheet for its country.

Jamaluddin said many countries in the world had begun using deficit budgets and the United States itself was expected to introduce a similar budget.

He said the nation's economic fundamentals were strong and this included trade surplus recorded for 57 consecutive months, minimal foreign borrowings and most of the loans made were domestic.

Jamaluddin also said the country's economic recovery could be observed as moving in tandem with the government's regaining of support from the Malays.

"This was evident with Barisan Nasional's (BN) victory in by-elections lately," he said.

He said the Malays were now aware and confident of the efforts carried out by the government under the leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Meanwhile Datuk Zulhasnan Rafique (BN-Wangsa Maju) asked Wisma Putra whether there was any protocol imposed by the United States authorities on leaders of other nations who visited the country.

He cited the incident where Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had to undergo various hassles at the Los Angeles Airport when he was leaving for New York to deliver a speech at the United Nations General Assembly recently.

Zulhasnan said he learnt that Abdullah had to undergo detailed inspections by the United States authorities like having to remove his shoes and belt despite having a diplomatic passport.

"I want clarification from the Foreign Ministry whether such inspections were also imposed on other heads of countries," he said.

Datuk Dr Hassan Ali (PAS-Parit Buntar) denied that he issued words meant to belittle the Javanese community and their language, as claimed by several government backbenchers and the media.

He admitted having raised fears that the Malay language would diminish as a language used to master knowledge, as what had happened to Sanskrit and Javanese languages following the government's decision to use English as the medium of teaching for science and mathematic subjects in schools.

Dr Hassan said he had never uttered words meant to derogate the Javanese people and language as he was merely highlighting the need to

safeguard the interest of the Malays.

During a debate on the use of English as the medium of teaching for science and mathematic subjects, at the Dewan Rakyat sitting last week, several backbenchers claimed that Dr Hassan had mentioned that the Javanese language had plunged to the "bahasa pasar" level.

This drew flak from some quarters who said that the PAS MP was trying to belittle the Javanese community.

Meanwhile Kerk Kim Hock (DAP-Kota Melaka) called for measures to attract more Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) into the country after a United States-based FDI Confidence Index showed that Malaysia had dropped out from its list of top 25 countries.

He said Malaysia, previously ranked 22nd in the index, should be aware that international trade no longer focused on low production costs alone but also on huge market like that of China's.

Kerk said China was now focusing on technology as well as labour-intensive industries in its efforts to bring in the FDIs.

He also urged the Home Ministry to clarify whether the summonses issued by the police under Section 115 of the Road Traffic Act were valid or the otherwise.

Kerk said if the summonses were invalid, those who had paid the fines must be refunded.

Datuk Suhaili Abdul Rahman (BN-Labuan) urged the government to review the costs of housing projects for the hardcore poor (PPRT) to streamline it with current needs.

He said the amount needed to build a PPRT house was RM11,000 and after taking into account the costs needed for water and power supply connection as well as contractor's fees, the amount left would be only around RM5,000.

"Imagine a house built with this amount (of money). Maybe it is slightly better than a chicken coop," he said.

In line with the government's plan to turn Labuan into an international shipping hub, Suhaili called for the setting up of Labuan International Nautical School and Labuan Maritime Authority.

Zawawi Ahmad (PAS-Padang Terap) called for the Education Ministry to take "concrete" measures to overcome the shortage of English language teachers in schools, a problem which he said had existed for a long time.

He also urged the ministry to provide enough teaching aids especially for schools in rural areas.

"This problem (English teachers' shortage) have yet to be solved despite being repeatedly highlighted and now the teachers are being burdened by the teaching of Mathematic and Science in English," he said.

He said the main reason why rural students were left behind in the English, mathematic and science subjects was due to lack of teachers and teaching gears and not due to poor intelligence.

The House resumes its sitting tomorrow.

-- BERNAMA

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