

Anwar challenges Najib to debate on the economy
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Pakatan Rakyat de facto chief Anwar Ibrahim today challenged Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to a national debate to see who offers the better economic policies for Malaysia.

Anwar said it is only proper for Najib to take him up on his "invitation", as the premier had publicly questioned and ridiculed Pakatan's policies and figures outlined in their ambitious 100-day economic transformation plan.

The PKR advisor said the prime minister's attack yesterday on Pakatan's economic policies was unfounded.

The BN's own policies are the very reason the country's national debt has hit RM362.39 billion or 53.7 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), said Anwar, a former finance minister.

Anwar said that by addressing just two of the many problems at hand - corruption and leakages, and cutting subsidies for independent power producers (IPP) - Pakatan could help the country save RM51 billion.

Training his guns on the IPPs, he said Petronas is forced to subsidise the top five IPPs a total of RM19 billion annually for gas used in power production, enriching a select few cronies while bleeding the rakyat dry.

"You don't subsidise a billionaire, (but) this is what's happening in this country," he said at a press conference at the PKR headquarters in Petaling Jaya today.

Anwar pointed out that Pakatan pledges to also launch an "all out war" against corruption at all levels in the government, starting with the political leadership - a move that would save the country RM28 billion based on the Auditor-General's estimates.

"Similarly, we will undertake an overhaul of the toll concession system to return the RM4 billion worth of compensation paid to concessionaires back to the national treasury.

"These two quick actions will yield an additional RM51 billion financial muscle for a Pakatan federal government to implement our 100-day reform programmes, the cost of which is only a third of the amount," he said.

Education, subsidies the focal points

Anwar said their 100-day reform plan will only cost an additional RM19.2 billion, which equals the amount the government spends on corporate subsidies for the IPPs.

From the reform budget, Pakatan promises to implement a RM500 monthly teaching allowance for teachers and education officers costing an estimated RM3.2 billion annually, on top of a RM4 billion budget for a restructured fuel subsidy system that targets the lower income groups.

The reform plan also pledges to continue LPG subsidies to the tune of RM4 billion every year, while the government will only have to fork out an extra RM8 billion to acquire minority shareholding to launch a restructuring of the toll system under PLUS - estimated to cost a total of RM23 billion based on the current offer made by Khazanah and EPF.

In an immediate response to the debate challenge, Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin tweeted:

"Is that all you've got, Sir? Retweeting someone else's words. You and me, Dato' Seri. On the economy. Let's debate."

This invited a quick retort from an Anwar supporter: "Why would Anwar want to debate an outgoing MP? Besides, not even a minister and 4th floor."

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