

Shadow budget 'not a vote-buying attempt'

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By Aidila Razak

Pakatan Rakyat yesterday came out in defence of its shadow budget, dismissing claims that it is offering bonuses to win over votes in the next general election, which may be called anytime now.

Speaking at a forum on the shadow budget in Shah Alam, PKR strategy chief Rafizi Ramli said the bonuses and pay rises announced by Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim were in line with policy, and not meant to be "sweeteners".

"We are not trying to sweeten things before the polls, (like) the BN which uses civil service pay hikes as a way to gain votes.

"Pakatan sees it through the framework of policy. For example, the RM500 allowance for teachers is seen as a way to raise the standard of teaching and is an investment for education," Rafizi told an audience of about 150.

He said the same went for the RM5.7 billion allocated to move civil servants up the pay scale.

"This is because we want to implement minimum wage for all citizens, and not just private workers," he added.

youth leaders wacana ekonomi 120611 rafizi ramli.JPG Rafizi (right), who is part of the committee responsible for drafting the shadow budget, said it was in fact "easy" for Pakatan to find the money to pay for its promised bonuses, as its budget was smaller than the BN government's 2011 budget of RM227 billion.

"It is expected that this Budget 2012 could reach up to RM238 billion. This is RM18 billion more than our budget, so those who say that our budget is not financially feasible do not have much grey matter up there," he said, snidely.

Working backwards, Rafizi said Pakatan had arrived at the RM220 billion limit as its goal was to bring the ballooning deficit down to a manageable level of 4.4 percent.

"From the RM220 billion, RM118 billion comes from government revenue through taxes, licences and dividends, so the remainder RM39 billion (of the total budget) must be in the form of deficit," he said.

Conservative estimate of wastage cuts

Rafizi said Pakatan calculated that the civil service pay hike, senior citizen, homemaker and working mother bonuses, as well as hardcore poverty income top-up would cost a total of RM12.8 billion.

He claimed that at least half of this could be paid through better governance and reduction of wastage, with Pakatan taking a "conservative" estimate of how much it could save this way.

NONE"Malaysia lost RM28 billion due to wastages in 2008. The figure is likely higher now, as the budget is higher. If we can just cut 20 percent of this, we can easily get the (roughly) RM6 billion.

"RM220 billion is actually small compared with what BN is spending, but the difference is, we bring added value for the rakyat. We get 13 laptops for RM40,000 when BN gets one," he said, prompting titters in the audience.

Also on the panel were DAP's Bukit Bendera MP Liew Chin Tong and Kuala Selangor MP Dzulkefly Ahmad of PAS.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak is due to table the budget in Parliament tomorrow, with analysts expecting more pump priming and cost of living allowances, on the back of higher energy prices.

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