

Budget: Who's handing out the better deal?
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While the Budget 2012 appears to be missing the pizzazz of its predecessor, it also promises one-off bonuses to the rakyat, putting cash straight into people's pockets.

NONEAs the polls loom large, the bonuses are also a signal to core voting blocs like servicemen, civil servants, senior citizens and working families.

Malaysiakini compares the bonus payments proposed by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak (right, standing) while tabling the budget at Parliament yesterday, to those in the Pakatan Rakyat shadow budget.

Low income households:

Pakatan:

- * Top up of allowance for low income earners to ensure minimum income of RM550 monthly;
- * RM1,000 per year for homemakers for families earning RM1500 a month and below;
- * RM1,000 per year childcare assistance for mothers from households earning RM1,500 per month and below;
- * Raise threshold for welfare benefits of those eligible for benefits to RM500 monthly income; and,
- * Floor wage of RM1,100 in public and private sector.

BN:

- * One-off RM500 for households earning 3,000 per month and below;
- * One-off RM100 schooling assistance for primary and secondary school students from age 6 to 16, up to Form 5 from low-income families; and,
- * Waiver of primary and secondary school fees for all.

Senior citizens

Pakatan:

- * RM1,000 per year for senior citizens with income of RM1500 a month and below.

BN:

- * Waiver of the RM2 fee for outpatient treatment at government hospitals and clinics, plus 50 percent discount for LRT and monorail rides.

Civil servants

Pakatan

- * Civil service will move up pay scale in line with RM1,100 minimum wage policy.

BN:

- * Half-month bonus
- * New time-based pay-scale scheme to allow quicker promotions and higher salary hikes when scaling the ladder.

Other bonuses

BN:

- * One-off payment of RM3,000 for ex-servicemen or their widows/widowers and,
- * The same those who have completed their contracts with Department of Special Affairs (Jasa), Ministry of Information, Communication and Culture and Jabatan Kemajuan Masyarakat (Kemas), Ministry of Rural and Regional Development.
- * No excise duty and sales tax for locally-made taxis, including change of ownership, plus waiver of road tax for individually-owned budget taxis, a two percent subsidy on loans for locally-made taxis and assistance of up to RM3,000 for disposal of old taxis.
- * Subsidised groceries and meals through the expansion of Kedai Rakyat 1Malaysia and Menu Rakyat nationwide.

Pakatan:

- * Agriculture subsidies to be channelled straight to smallholders via local associations, and not to monopolies like Bernas, that is currently the sole distributor of local and imported rice.
- * Cheaper consumer goods and services, like telecommunications, air travel, satellite television, through the dismantling of monopolies and making illegal the predatory practices of Telekom Malaysia.

Structural or short-term measures?

Commenting on the difference between the BN and Pakatan budgets, DAP-Petaling Jaya Utara MP Tony Pua in a statement today said that Pakatan is offering policy changes to rectify distortions in the economy to ease the rakyat's burden in the long term.

NONEPua (right) said that Pakatan's budget addresses structural issues in the labour market, while showing willingness to "slaughter sacred cows" by taking measures to dismantle monopolies and restructuring concessions

"The question is, beneath (BN's) sweeteners, are there substantive reforms proposed in the Budget 2012 to make 'transformative' changes to our economy?"

"The (Budget 2012) prescribes a sugar-coated placebo that makes you feel good in the short term, only to tax you more later, while (the Pakatan shadow budget) seeks to ease the pain and cure the illness at the lowest possible cost," he said.

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