

**People's needs come first, insists Pakatan
Malaysiakini.com
October 10,2011
By S Pathmawathy**

Pakatan Rakyat parliamentarians have no complaints about the government's U-turn on the proposed hike in MPs' allowance.

This morning, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz said the proposed revision of allowances and facilities will be withdrawn due to resistance from the opposition.

The proposal would have cost RM30 million to implement if passed under Budget 2012, which was tabled in the Dewan Rakyat last Friday.

Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim reiterated that the move is not appropriate, given the current economic climate.

Approached by reporters in the Parliament lobby, he conceded that opposition MPs had also backed the proposal.

NONE“ ... (But the proposal) does not make sense ... and it is not reasonable that the BN government disagrees with our proposal for minimum wage,” he said.

He was also asked to commented on a proposal by the opposition representative in the parliamentary review committee, to allocate funds for research assistants.

“ ... That is specific. If it is money you are adding to appoint new staff as research assistants or for the constituency (it is different but) that was not proposed. What was proposed was a substantial increase in the allowance, plus other perks,” Anwar said.

“We have said ‘No’ to that sort of proposal but if they want to come back with a proposal, say they want to provide an allocation for research officers, assistants in Parliament, that is something else.”

Nazri had further said the main concern in mooted the increment was the hardship faced by full-time junior parliamentarians and those servicing rural constituencies.

“Yes, that is true... ,” responded Anwar.

“I'm not saying they are comfortable now but I'm saying, how do you rationalise when some people are facing similar or worse hardship? I'm not saying you should not consider but how can you do it at this time? You meet the people on the street, you see the condition of their lives.”

‘Not the right time’

PKR deputy president Azmin Ali, also the Gombak MP, that the proposal was a "trap" set by the BN.

NONE“We said after the Budget was tabled that, on principle, Pakatan representatives do not accept the proposal because this is the time when attention needs to be given to the future of the rakyat,” said Azmin.

The people are faced with an increasing cost of living, he said, which is why the proposal had been rejected by Pakatan.

" ...This is why I welcome the decision to withdraw the (proposal). We can review but this is not the right time. That is the issue. Is this the right time? No."

MPs' allowances have been revised five times - in 1992, 1997, 2001, 2002 and 2005 - since the Members of Parliament (Remuneration) Bill was enacted in 1980.

Under the last amendment in 2005, their basic allowance was increased from RM5,916.90 to RM6,508.59.

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