

Budget 2012 passed
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The RM232.8 billion 2012 Supply Bill (Budget 2012) was passed by the Dewan Rakyat today after nearly a month of intense debate.

It was passed at 10.33pm after the third reading by Second Finance Minister Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah (left), through a majority voice vote.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak tabled the Bill for its first reading on October 7. It exceeds the present year's budget by 9.4 percent.

RM181.6 billion was specified for operations expenditures and RM51.2 billion for development spending.

In his speech, Najib had said that the budget will continue to be in deficit following the trend since 1998, though he projected the deficit to fall to 4.7 percent next year.

'Populist'

The opposition, who accused it of being a "feel good" election budget, took pot-shots at what it said were populist measures, such as the one-off payments to households earning RM3,000 and below.

Ironically, the opposition had also accused the federal Budget of consisting of "copy and paste" elements from Pakatan Rakyat's proposed shadow budget, which had similar payments.

Pakatan took the government's fiscal proposal apart for alleged irregularities, such as the implementation of the RM100 assistance to students prior to the Budget's passage.

Also on the opposition's chopping block was the extended delay of the annual Auditor-General's Report and the lack of concrete action taken to address the irregularities addressed in the audit.

Usually tabled prior to the Budget to allow parliamentarians to debate issues it raised, Pakatan questioned the delay, claiming it reeks of a government cover up.

Distractions

Critics had also accused BN of trying to sidetrack closer examination of the fiscal document by way of generating overreaction towards Sexualiti Merdeka and the Himpunan Sejuta Umat (Himpun) controversy.

Himpun, organised last month, was intended to unite Muslims to "defend their faith" amidst claims of Christian proselytisation. It attracted some 5,000 attendees.

Critics accused the government of using the gathering to try to provoke fears amongst Muslims and drum up support for Malay-based Umno.

The Sekualiti Merdeka event - held since 2008 to advocate rights for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, intersexual and queer (LGBTIQ) community - was cancelled after a slew of protests by groups against the programme.