

Opposition questions strategies to achieve Budget 2023 targets

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Alyaa Alhadjri, Hariz Mohd & Yasmin Ramlan

PARLIAMENT | Opposition leader Hamzah Zainudin today questioned perceived gaps in specific strategies to achieve "well-meaning targets" set out under the government's maiden budget tabled by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim as finance minister.

In particular, Hamzah, as the first MP to debate the budget in the policy stage, highlighted the government's aim to reduce the country's fiscal deficit from 5.5 to 5 percent, as well as to eradicate hardcore poverty by year-end.

Throughout his 90-minute speech, Hamzah repeatedly said the opposition sympathised with Anwar and was willing to cooperate with suggestions that would ultimately benefit the people.

"I feel sorry because when Tambun (Anwar) said no matter what, it is of utmost importance for us to reduce the country's fiscal deficit.

"That is something that we feel is good, but what are the strategies? There was absolutely no explanation," said the Larut MP.

Among others, Hamzah (above) said Anwar did not touch on any measures to increase the government's revenue stream via new opportunities that were identified by the previous administration under its Shared Economic Vision.

"If the country's economic foundation remains reliant on commodities, for example, through Petronas, this is an area which I feel requires thought on how economic growth can be achieved with new revenue streams so the targets can be met," he said, citing as an example Malaysia's potential to be the new digital Islamic banking hub.

On poverty eradication goals, Hamzah again congratulated Anwar for the government's commitment, while at the same time, cautioning against giving the people false hope.

"Because we are only left with about nine months (to year-end) so I would suggest that we tweak the sentence, not to 'end' but to reduce hardcore poverty... because there is no strategy," said Hamzah.

Ronald Kiandee (PN-Beluran), who interjected Hamzah, however, remarked that

Anwar should be allowed to stick to the goal as it would greatly benefit his constituency that recorded a "double- digit" poverty level.

'Don't be so arrogant'

Further, Hamzah noted how measures announced in the budget to assist the hardcore poor under the People's Income Initiative were supposedly copied from past initiatives, and so urged the current administration to engage with the opposition on its past successes.

"I myself have been a part of various committees as the former domestic trade and cooperatives minister. Next to me is Pagoh (Muhyiddin Yassin) who also held various cabinet positions... so we can sit down and discuss.

"Pandan's formulas may be great but finally (the government) accepted our formula. This is for national interest, so don't be so arrogant," he said in a swipe at Economy Minister Rafizi Ramli, who is Pandan MP.

Yesterday, Rafizi launched the government's People's Income Initiative (IPR) aimed at increasing the income of the hardcore poor and B40 group to at least RM2,000 a month through three main segments - Inisiatif Usahawan Tani (Intan), Inisiatif Usahawan Makanan (Insan) and Inisiatif Operator Perkhidmatan

(Ikhsan).

Throughout Hamzah's speech, various PN MPs also took turns to insinuate that Anwar was not affording the opposition the same treatment that he received from the previous administration.

Hamzah, who reiterated PN's equal funding call for all MPs, said it is up to the government to address a perception that the budget is one which is fair and just.

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