

King bemoans abuse of subsidies
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The King Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin today expressed his regret over the abuse of subsidies by certain quarters in his opening address at the 12th Parliament.

In his 30-minute royal address, presented by the Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to him, the king said he was saddened to learn that certain quarters had abused the subsidy facility by hoarding essential goods and also smuggling them out of the country to make huge profits for themselves.

"This act is very demeaning because it makes the people suffer and takes away their rights," the king told a packed house of parliamentarians, senators, diplomats and top government figures.

He said the government would strive to retain its subsidies and other forms of assistance to enable the people face the consequences of rising fuel prices in the international market.

The king added more than RM36 billion has been allocated for the purpose and so far various forms of subsidy and assistance had been made available to offset higher prices for goods and ease the burden of expenditure on the people.

"The high fuel prices in the international market have had a direct impact on the prices of goods and services.

"The government has therefore taken various measures including imposing price control and stepping up enforcement to stem price increases for the well-being of the people, particularly those in the low-income group," he said.

12th malaysia parliament official king opening 290408 01 Among those turned up today included opposition figurehead Anwar Ibrahim, who was present in his capacity as the spouse to Parliamentary Opposition Leader Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail (PKR-Permatang Pauh).

This is the first time Anwar was in the house in a decade's time after his unceremonious sacking from the government in 1998 as the deputy prime minister.

The Raja Permaisuri Agong, Tuanku Nur Zahirah, was also present.

Corridors for all

Tuanku Mizan also said that he wanted the government to ensure that its five regional economic development corridors will benefit all the people.

This, he said, was because the economic development projects were not confined to specific areas but covered the whole country, and had the potential to create more than 12 million jobs in various sectors.

"As such, I hope the implementation of the five regional economic development corridors will spur greater economic activities, raise the living standard of the people, eradicate poverty and reduce the income gap among races, states and regions," he said.

parliament 2008 first day 280408 14 "I extend my congratulations to the prime minister (Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) for leading the nation to economic success in the face of external challenges such as a moderate world economic growth, rising world crude oil and food prices, and stiff competition in terms of trade and investment," he said.

The king said the country's economy exceeded the six per cent target to register a growth of 6.3 per cent last year and the per capita income rose to more than RM23,000 while the inflation rate was kept low, at two per cent, and the rate of unemployment maintained at 3.3 per cent.

Re-evaluating priorities

He also said he wanted the government re-evaluate the priorities accorded to the development programmes and projects of the ongoing Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP). He added this was needed to achieve the objectives of the national mission.

"I appreciate the determination of the government in the implementation of the development projects under the 9MP. Up to last March, RM81.7 billion or a sum equivalent to 40.8 per cent of the total allocation of RM200 billion, has been spent.

"This has given a positive impact to the nation's economic growth, particularly in the construction sector and construction-related industries.

"I hope this rate of sustainable growth can be maintained," he said.

parliament 2008 first day 280408 13 The king said he was proud of the government's success in reducing the poverty rate to 3.6 per cent compared to the 75 per cent when the nation achieved its independence, with the hardcore poverty rate having dropped to 0.7 per cent.

"I am confident that hardcore poverty can be wiped out by 2010," he said.

He also wanted the government, in facing a more challenging environment, to enhance efforts to exploit new sources of growth and new markets while expanding existing markets.

He said the government should come up with new products and services, establish smart partnerships and upgrade efficiency and productivity.

He added he was confident the nation would chalk up bigger successes, comparable to those attained by developed countries, when it entered the second 50-year phase of its development after independence.