

Anwar promises new and better Budget
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Beh Lih Yi

Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim today said that he would unveil a new Budget if his Pakatan Rakyat managed to take over government by its self-imposed deadline of Sept 16. MCPX

He said that the main theme of his alternate Budget would be to cut down the deficit, lower taxes and fuel prices, stimulate investments and adopt open tenders for government contracts.

He said this when was asked whether he would unveil a new Budget if he assumes power of the government. A confident Anwar - a former finance minister - cheekily responded: "The question is not if, but when."

anwar pc on budget 2009 020908 02At a press conference today, he blasted the Budget 2009 tabled by the government last week as yet another indication of the government's failure to provide sound economic direction in a challenging global and domestic environment.

"If we can form the government, this Budget (by the BN government) shall be reviewed and a new budget will be tabled, insyallah (God willing)," he said at an hour-long press conference held at PKR party headquarters in Tropicana, Petaling Jaya.

He was accompanied by his wife and party president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, her deputy Dr Syed Husin Ali and information chief Tian Chua. A number of party MPs were also present.

'BN's exaggerating claims'

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, as finance minister, tabled his Budget for 2009 in Parliament last Friday and since received mixed reviews for it.

Opposition parties have expressed disappointment with Abdullah's failure to provide new incentives to stimulate growth in the economy and are worried about the ballooning budget deficit.

Anwar in the same vein criticised Abdullah's budget today, alleging that the government was "exaggerating claims and misrepresenting statistics to create a rosy picture on its achievements and economic progress".

Elaborating on his Budget, Anwar vowed to cut the budget deficit - which is an expectant 3.6 percent of the GDP for 2009 and 4.8 percent this year - down to three percent.

"We have to go down gradually as we have to first look at the figures whether we can reach the three percent deficit immediately which is more tenable if we can sustain it," he said.

anwar pc on budget 2009 020908 01He was however quick to add that he was confident that the deficit would drop below the present 4.8 percent if steps to enhance competitiveness were incorporated whilst discarding the practice of awarding government

projects without tenders.

"This would by itself reduce the (government's) expenditure and I believe if we can do it efficiently, we can save RM4 billion to RM5 billion at one go, reducing the registered deficit," he said.

He criticised the BN government for spending irresponsibly and disregarding the burden that would befall future generations.

"I feel and suspect that Abdullah knows his days are numbered so he spent as much as possible because he knows the next government will be able to deal with that," Anwar quipped.

The opposition leader also said he was committed to reduce the fuel prices - an election promise he has pledged - and to lower the personal and corporate tax to alleviate the burden of the rakyat.

"My economic philosophy has always been 'no tax, increase productivity', I have not changed with that position. Lower the tax, the better and higher the productivity," he noted.

APs to be auctioned

Also in his 11-page economic policy paper which he read out at the press conference, Anwar explained that he'll reform the public tender system gradually and ensure government contracts are tendered in an open, competitive and transparent process by 2015.

He also proposed the current system of awarding the approved permits (APs) free to a "select pool of businessmen" to be replaced by auctions - to be won by highest bidders thereby generating income.

"Based on an estimated 70,000 APs issued per annum and a conservative RM25,000 market price, the auction will provide an additional RM1.75 billion to government coffers," he stated.

abdullah ahmad badawi government projects 040604He vowed to cut down on public expenditure on mega projects and to review proposed mega-projects costing more than RM1 billion under the Ninth Malaysia Plan to assess their "socio-economic viability, affordability and intended impact on national development".

He reiterated that these reforms, such as retracting bumiputeras' exclusive rights to APs and certain government contracts, did not mean that the community as a whole will lose out.

Instead, he stressed, Malays who have been lagging behind all these years will be uplifted, while at the same time, the other communities will have equal access to these opportunities.

"The Malays will not lose, the country will win. The few Malay (cronies) companies may lose out but the Malays will not lose, Pakatan will not allow the Malays to lose.

"(The government's procurement process) has to be implemented in a transparent manner, the revenue by the government will be distributed fairly and equally," he said.

On the same matter, he reiterated his pledge to abolish the New Economic Policy (NEP) but said affirmative action policy to help the poor and the marginalised will continue under the Malaysian Economic Agenda which he advocates.

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