

## **Goodie Bags And... Anything Else?**

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Nobody can resist goodie bags. And there were lots of them in Budget 2012! Many were happy, some ecstatic. But some groups like the middle-income earners and special needs people felt short-changed. Their goodie bag was almost empty. Sabah and Sarawak are also feeling neglected. Spending millions on mega projects in Peninsular Malaysia but not even looking into developing something as sorely needed as "basic infrastructure" in East Malaysia is not right.

Generosity is commendable but is the approach taken in the Budget sustainable? Is it fiscally viable? Economists are uneasy. Will we lose our "competitiveness?" What about boosting productivity and output? Can we achieve high-income status this way?

Our economic growth will be "between 5 to 6 percent" and deficit will be reduced to 4.2 percent of GDP, declares the government. Ironically, economists and analysts forecast a different set of numbers – a lower growth and a higher deficit. Right now it's a numbers game! The verdict may not be out until too late.

It doesn't make sense – why not have a Budget that outlines a plan to solve the economic problems plaguing Malaysia, asks Dr Jeyakumar, MP for Sungei Siput. And, what about "wastefulness" and "inefficiency"? Shouldn't they be addressed in the Budget too? Leakages, wastage and unaccounted-for expenses – let's put a plug on all of them!

### **Talking about spending...**

Our Ringgit is 'flying high'. Judging from the way money is spent, we are not facing an economic slowdown, apparently.

The talk of the town is PM Najib's trip to faraway Kazakhstan. Why? It cost "RM1m"! His official trip coincided with his daughter's engagement ceremony which was held there. Soon after, Turkmenistan beckoned. The expenses – RM 323,268.

How much does it cost to make you look good? "RM94m!" This was the amount paid to FBC Media to make the government look great in the world arena. Because of irregularities, FBC is now under investigation by British authorities. In the meantime, all programmes produced by the company are "suspended." Obviously it's money down the drain again.

Another bone of contention is MACC getting an increased allocation of "RM211" million for 2012. For this amount of money MACC had better 'up' its game. Low conviction rates, two deaths and abuse of power are defining this anti-corruption agency. To catch the really 'big fish', one has to cast the net further and deeper into the ocean. Fortifying the net with some good old fashioned determination, integrity and perseverance would certainly help.

Mega expenses, costs and payments are making our Ringgit fly. Whoa...let's put a rein on our spending!

**Bersih Inquiry : Let's come clean**

Authority figures are in the spotlight again. First the MACC, now the police. The inquiry into the Bersih 2.0 march for electoral reforms on July 9 is on. 'Tears and fears' were aplenty during the rally and the aftermath of it are accusations of "human rights violations." The marchers say yes, the police say no.

Suhakam is now investigating to ascertain the truth. Evidence has emerged showing aggression and assault on a "non-hostile" crowd. An eyewitness, lawyer Nor Syazwani, said Riot police fired tear gas directly into the crowd. Someone also witnessed the police "kicking" a boy and manhandling peaceful protesters. Will the wrongdoers be brought to justice? Wait and see.

### **Let's take a vote on 'Undilah'**

We are all voting for electoral reform but what's the vote on the video 'Undilah' that tells Malaysians to exercise their constitutional "right to vote"? Axe it, says the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC)! You can't broadcast it on TV, it tells the producer. Chop, chop! The axe comes down hard! No clear reason is given. Well, if you have the power, wield it, why not.

Looks like even a stellar cast of prominent people like Afdlin Shauki, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, Tony Pua, Wee Ka Siong etc. are no match for officialdom. Never mind, if not on TV, our good ole internet is televising it. The producer is adamant about not removing it from the Net. Good for you Pete Teo!

### **Celebrating Deepavali in Parliament**

Deepavali is round the corner but Indian opposition MPs are fuming because they may be spending the auspicious day in Parliament. A meeting has been scheduled for the eve of the festival. Reschedule it, they cry. Rap the knuckles of those who are insensitive and lack "knowledge" of national festivals.

No protest is forthcoming from the MIC though. Should there be no postponement, at least make sure the Indians are served thosai, curry and muruku during the breaks!

### **Another rally on Nov 3?**

Looks like another rally is on the horizon after Bersih 2.0. The Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC), with 802,323 workers under its wing, is all riled up over proposed amendments made to the Employment Act. It says the changes are "draconian." Why put job security and workers' rights on the line? So come Nov 3 we will see a nationwide picket to protest the amendments. Equally incensed is Human Resources Minister, Subramaniam who wants MTUC to call off the protest.

Will MTUC heed the call or will the rally go on? Stay tuned.

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