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Ensuring well-being of nation in push forward

THE 2012 Budget tabled yesterday seeks to ensure that every Malaysian remains on board in the nation's push towards developed-nation status, even as the economy faces threats amid the weak global environment.

Tabling a liberal yet realistic budget at the Dewan Rakyat, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said it was one crafted to continue transforming the economy while ensuring the well-being of the rakyat.

Clearly, the long-term measures in the RM230.83 billion 2012 Budget are aimed at keeping the economy moving and the development of a better society, while a number of short-term ones are designed to provide immediate reprieve for low-to-medium-income earners within the currently environment of high-cost living.

The budget touches almost every segment of society, from schoolchildren and students at institutions of higher learning to retirees, and from urban dwellers to those living in rural areas. There are goodies for civil servants, uniformed personnel and the commercial sector.

For the commercial sector, there are measures that will benefit both small and big businesses, and others to ensure that Malaysia moves ahead in innovation.

The low-to-medium-income earners, however, will reap the benefits almost immediately.

For instance, a one-off payment of RM500 will be provided to households with a monthly income of less than RM3,000 to help ease the high cost of living. The move, which will benefit about 3.4 million households, is unprecedented.

For the first time, too, primary and secondary education will be provided free of charge as all fees have been abolished, while school aid of RM100 each will be given to primary and secondary schoolchildren.

The 2012 Budget also signals transformation for the rural areas, whereby funds have been allocated to improve quality of life, with the long-term goal to reduce urban migration.

Civil servants, including uniformed personnel, enjoy a windfall in the



form of additional bonuses and financial assistance for further studies, while pensioners and former contract government workers, too, have received benefits.

High on Malaysians' wish-list in the run-up to the 2012 Budget has been for the government to keep house prices affordable.

Towards this end, Najib yesterday announced expansion of the "My First Home" scheme as well as other public housing schemes.

Measures to control speculation in the housing sector have also been announced, a move that would keep house prices at affordable levels.

Senior citizens have not been forgotten as outpatient registration charges will be waived for this group at all government hospitals, 1Malaysia clinics and dental clinics. The elderly will also enjoy a 50 per cent discount on light rail transit and monorail fares.

The provision of quality healthcare will continue, not only through construction of more hospitals but also by restructuring the allowances of medical officers to ensure better quality of service.

For the women, a micro-financing facility has been formed, while retired female professionals will receive training to enable them to return to employment.

The government has also allocated RM50 million to provide free immunisation against the human papillomavirus (HPV) for women.

Youth and budget taxi owners were also beneficiaries of the budget.

Across Malaysia, the 2012 Budget was largely seen as one with the future in sight although many of the measures announced seem short-



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak is accompanied by his deputy, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin (left), to the Dewan Rakyat for the tabling of the 2012 Budget yesterday. — NST picture by Mohd Fadli Hamzah

term in nature.

"What is important is the creation of a brighter future for every Malaysian child, a future full of hope and prosperity, not fear or hatred. Over the last 30 months, the government has charted a clear path for our beloved nation to achieve its national vision," Najib said in his speech.

The prime minister paid tribute to his predecessors, saying Malaysia would not be where it is today without the political stability espoused by Barisan Nasional's power-sharing concept.

"More importantly, it (the national vision) will never materialise without the support of the rakyat."