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Najib confronts critics from both sides

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DATUK Seri Najib Tun Razak did not shy away from confronting his critics from "outside and within" when tabling Budget 2016.

In his speech before Members of Parliament in the Dewan Rakyat, the Prime Minister slammed those who had spelt out a doomsday scenario for the country's economy under his leadership.

"We deeply regret the irresponsible acts of enemies - both outside and from within - trying to damage the image of this country," he said.

Without naming names, Najib said it was unfortunate that some of the attacks were coming from people whom he did not expect.

"There exist some people, sometimes, whom we did not expect, who are fanning the Oames and become the enemy within," said Najib, using the Malay phrases *api di dalam sekam* and *gunting dalam lipatan* to make his point.

Najib pointed out that despite

being criticised for introducing the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the decision had clearly proven to be the right one, with the petroleum royalties and dividends that the Government could collect down due to low oil prices.

"Because of the reduction in petroleum revenue, it is the GST collection which has served to shore up much of the shortfall," he said.

Without the GST, which was a more efficient replacement of the old Sales and Services Tax (SST), Najib said total revenue would have shrunk by RM21bil.

"If this has happened, the Government would have needed to borrow money to pay the salaries of civil servants, the countrys credit rating would fall and the cost of borrowings rise," he said.

The Government, he said, had the political will to implement GST although the decision was unpopular.

"In fact, many on the other side (Opposition), who were originally vocal and strong opponents of the GST, have come to accept it and even included it in their (alternative) Budget," Najib said as Barisan Nasional lawmakers thumped their tables in support and Opposition MPs shouted their protests.

Addressing critics who had painted a doomsday scenario for the Malaysia economy allegedly on the verge of bankruptcy due to mismanagement, Najib outlined six of the Governmenfs achievements to prove them wrong.

These include continued economic growth expecting to reach between 4.5% and 5.5% this year - higher than the projected growth in the world economy of just 3.1%; the cutting of the fiscal deficit from 6.7% in 2009 to 3.2% this year; the slashing of poverty rates from 3.8% in 2009 to just 0.6% last year; and the fall in the unemploy-

ment rate from 3.4% in 1999 to 2.9% now.

"This shows that in reality, Malaysia, the country we all love, is not a failed or bankrupt country but remains stable and is still strong in terms of economic fundamentals and competitiveness," he said.

Najib said despite the many challenges, the Government would not give up in doirig its best for the country and the people.

"I, along with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and the members of the administration and leadership of the Barisan Nasional, are of one heart and soul and will remain strong and determined in continuing this noble effort," he said.

As soon as he ended his speech, Opposition MPs stood up holding placards with the words "Where is the RM2.6bil?"

However, Najib ignored them and-exited the hall.