



Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Umno stalwart Tan Sri Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah at a press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. PIC BY ASYRAF HAMZAH

THIRD READING

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'VOTE BASED ON CONSCIENCE'

Dr M, Ku Li advise MPs not to vote on Supply Bill based on their parties' stance

ADIB POVERA AND DAWN CHAN
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

THE stage is set for a showdown between the government and opposition in the Dewan Rakyat today with the fate of the 2021 Budget on the line.

The Supply Bill (Budget) 2021, whose only hurdle to being approved is its third reading, is in danger of being shot down after the opposition yesterday initiated calls for its rejection.

With the budgets for only the Education and Higher Education ministries left to be debated at the committee stage, Pakatan Harapan (PH), in a statement yesterday, called for a bloc vote to determine the fate of the bill in its entirety.

As of now, the Dewan Rakyat is home to 111 members of parliament (MPs) from the ruling coalition and 109 from the opposition and independent camps.

Two seats, Batu Sapi and Gerik, remain vacant following the deaths of their incumbents.

The passing of the bill will enable the government to carry out its programmes, which include efforts to mitigate the Covid-19 pandemic and revitalise the economy.

A rejection of the bill could lead to the administration, helmed by Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, experiencing a crisis of confidence, which by convention could lead to the dissolution of the cabinet.

PH, in a statement issued last night, said it was making good on its previous pledge to contest the budget.

"We had previously said that we would debate the 2021 Budget at the policy and committee levels, and finally put it to a bloc vote during the third reading.

"This will happen tomorrow," read the statement, which was signed by PKR secretary-general Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail, Parti Amanah Negara secretary-general Datuk Dr Mohd Hatta Md Ramli and DAP organising secretary Anthony Loke.

PH said the decision was a result of its dissatisfaction with Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz's alleged failure to "fulfil hopes and aspirations in the budget".

"This includes the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) issue, the

bank loan moratorium, assistance to frontliners who have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, education, issues on workers who have lost jobs or had their income reduced, the rising cost of living and many more.

"Therefore, we urge all MPs, whether from the opposition or those who pledged support for the government to reject the budget, which does not meet the objectives to fight Covid-19, help the people and revive the economy during the third reading."

Before the tabling of the 2021 Budget on Nov 6, Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah had advised MPs to fully support the budget for the sake of harmony and the rakyat's livelihoods, as well as for economic recovery, all of which have suffered due to the pandemic.

Earlier, one-time rivals turned allies, former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Umno stalwart Tan Sri Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, held a joint press conference to warn of the possibility of the budget being rejected.

The Langkawi and Gua Musang MPs urged fellow lawmakers to vote on the third reading of the bill based on their conscience and not on party lines for "the good of the people and country".

"If the government loses, I hope those in Parliament (the MPs) will begin to think not about

themselves, but the nation. If all the 222 elected representatives love the country, don't vote based on the lines of your political parties. Don't vote for the sake of yourselves but for the country.

"The government today is only immersed in its politics. There is no strategy to restore the country's economy and tackle the Covid-19 issue. We have 30 ministers, but we do not see them do anything because they do not have the experience," he said.

Dr Mahathir said if the budget was passed, Muhyiddin would continue to lead the government albeit with a small majority.

Dr Mahathir and Tengku Razaleigh said they had both discussed how the nation should be further developed and returned to its glory days as an "Asian Tiger".

"The people are fed up with politicians who only think of themselves and their respective political parties. What they (the public) want to see now is a dedicated government which focuses on serving the people and the country's development," Dr Mahathir said.

Tengku Razaleigh said he would abstain from voting for the bill.

"I am here sharing a platform with Dr Mahathir purely because I want to make sure we have a legitimate government. The government we have today is not legitimate. I won't be voting for the

budget. I am not taking part in the debate for the budget."

Asked if he would offer to lead the country once again should Muhyiddin's government fall, Dr Mahathir remained coy and said it was entirely up to the MPs to decide.

"If everybody supports me, I will become the prime minister. But I don't have a (projected) cabinet (line-up). The only line-up I want to see are people sincerely serving the people."

On the alleged command of a parliamentary majority claimed by PKR president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in his bid to become the next prime minister, Dr Mahathir said the reality suggested otherwise.

"The opposition leader (Anwar) does not command the majority (support) from the opposition. We are not under him. He is in name (only) as the opposition leader, but he does not control us. We can do what we like." **Additional reporting by Dhesegaan Bala Krishnan**

Page 1 pic: Seats belonging to parliamentary opposition members are empty after the lawmakers staged a walkout yesterday. They left the Dewan Rakyat after three MPs, who are supposed to be under home quarantine, attended the sitting wearing personal protective equipment.