

'MORE BORROWINGS NEEDED'

2022 Budget a risky one, says Najib

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THE newly-tabled 2022 Budget is a "risky" one given that Putrajaya has to borrow more funds at a time when the government's revenue projection is still low, says Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

The Pekan member of parliament said while the 2022 Budget was the largest one yet for the country, this was also taking place when the country is facing a high fiscal deficit.

Najib said the previous Pakatan Harapan (PH) government's decision to abolish the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and Perikatan Nasional's (PN) action in imposing continuous lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic had harmed the economy.

"Yet, Covid-19 infections and deaths were among the highest in Asean (countries) this year, compared with the total population size.

"Although more than RM600 billion has been spent in a year-and-a-half, it did not provide

enough benefits to the people, which is why today, the financial state of the government is in a critical situation.

"To me, this is happening because the governments that were formed after the 14th General Election (GE14) made the wrong decisions, starting with the scrapping of GST, high reliance on oil revenue, scaring off investors and the implementation of lockdowns," he told the Dewan Rakyat.

On Friday, Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz announced a RM332.1 billion expansionary Budget for next year, with the deficit to gross domestic product (GDP) expected to fall to six per cent from 6.5 per cent.

This is nearly three per cent more than the RM322.5 billion announced for the 2021 Budget.

Meanwhile, opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (PKR-Port Dickson) urged the govern-

ment to clarify the expenditure on "off-budget" projects, arguing that the public may have to eventually foot the bill.

He cited several projects, including the nationwide 5G rollout, the possible revival of the High-Speed Rail project, attempts to privatise the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang, Selangor, as well as 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB), which incurred RM32.3 billion in debt.

"It's untrue that off-budget expenditure does not involve government funds as it is the government that will ultimately be paying for this. The prime minister used to say these (projects) do not involve government expenditure. This is not true.

"Take the 1MDB issue (for example). Until today, the government still owes RM32 billion for this. RM12.8 billion has already been paid with RM10 billion borrowings while the remainder

came from the consolidated account. Who will pay for this if not the government?"

On the 5G rollout, Anwar claimed that the operating cost for Digital Nasional Bhd (DNB), which was set up to build and own Malaysia's 5G network infrastructure, had exceeded RM18.9 billion.

"We need to hold the government responsible for the implementation of these mega-projects, particularly the 5G network spearheaded by the DNB, without any detailed explanation."

"It's time the government provides more answers about off-budget projects and it should start by explaining everything about the 5G project, which is being handled by DNB.

"What is the tender process? Which big companies are involved? Why is everything shrouded in secrecy? Is the budget RM11 billion or RM20 billion?"