

GST and 'cash is king' rule debate

Najib focuses on benefits of aid, Anwar says GST an unfair taxation system

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KUALA LUMPUR: Are cash give-aways the way to solve the problems of the masses and would the goods and services tax (GST) have helped?

Former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak seems to think so, and he said as much in his debate yesterday with PKR president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

If the GST introduced by his administration had been maintained, he said Putrajaya would have had an extra RM30bil to distribute to ordinary Malaysians affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We collect GST when times are good. And, when there are challenging times, we would have savings and this can be distributed to other Malaysians out there.

"This is the time for us to help the people. If GST had been maintained, I'm confident Malaysians would have had an easier life now," said Najib during the debate televised live on Astro Awani.

"With GST, we would have an additional RM30bil which could be distributed to farmers and fishermen. Fishermen used to get RM300 a month."

Answering a question later, Najib clarified his "cash is king" motto, claiming that the term "king" in the phrase referred to the rakyat.

He also stressed on the importance of political stability as the



Showdown in the spotlight: Najib and Anwar after the debate at Matic in Kuala Lumpur.

country recovers economically from the pandemic.

"We need to get back on the right track," Najib said, equating the economy to a cake that should be expanded so every Malaysian could enjoy a slice of it.

"As the cake gets bigger -with additional investments and people-centric projects, we can cut a bigger piece for the people."

Anwar, however, retorted that cake should not be solely enjoyed

by a single person, in an obvious jibe at the court charges that Najib faces.

"It is the political elites that eat most of the cake," he said.

On GST, Anwar said it wasn't a fair taxation system, given that most Malaysians are still economically affected by Covid-19.

"Imagine this, the people are poor and yet, they still have to pay GST.

"I have no problems debating this

in Parliament. But we shouldn't take the easy way out. There must be structural changes that begin from the top," he added.

Anwar claimed the former Pakatan Harapan government had been successful in addressing the rising cost of living, to both cheers and boos from the crowd.

The supporters from both sides, totalling about 400 invited guests, had gathered at Malaysia Tourism Centre (Matic) in Kuala Lumpur as

early as 6pm for the event that started at 9pm.

It started off with a debate on the ailing Sapura Energy Bhd, with Najib saying Malaysians would lose out if it was not saved.

He said this was because Sapura employed more than 10,500 locals and its beneficiary owners included the 10.6 million investors in Amanah Saham Bumiputera (ASB).

The Pekan MP said action should be taken if there was any misappropriation of funds.

Anwar, however, said there must be a forensic audit on the debt-laden oil and gas services company.

He pointed to the remuneration and pay package of Sapura's former group chief executive officer, who is said to have received more than a billion ringgit between 2019 and 2021, despite the company's problems.

He questioned why the company must be bailed out when its top gun made billions.

"We must see the bigger picture (from this aspect) of management problems, integrity and power abuse," he said, referring to a list of companies that had run into financial woes.

Anwar also cited the example of the troubled Perwaja Steel and how he ordered an audit to be conducted when he was finance minister.

Sapura Energy Bhd, which announced a loss of RM8.9bil in its latest annual report, is now in need of a bailout by Putrajaya after its earnings fell from RM1.45bil last year to RM450mil.