

Cabinet clamps down on debt

No more loans for non-urgent projects, says Anwar

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NILAI: The Cabinet has decided against taking on more debt to fund projects that are deemed not urgent but remains committed to helping the people, especially the hardcore poor, says Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The Prime Minister said his administration, which inherited some RM1.5 trillion in debt from the previous government, did not wish to burden future generations but has been working hard to reduce its current deficit.

"Our kids are the ones who are going to inherit these debts.

"That is the first thing they will have to worry about in life," he said at the launch of the Karnival Usahawan Desa at the Nilai Square here yesterday.

Anwar likened the country's situation to that of a family earning a monthly income of RM5,000 but having commitments totalling RM7,500.

"Some people ask why we need to talk about the past, while others think all is well. But I need to say this because we will be forced to reduce spending on projects that are not immediately required," he said.

However, Anwar said his administration would continue to fund critical programmes such as those under the Education and Health ministries and to build housing for the poor.

He said his government had in fact allocated an additional RM2bil for schools, which will be used to build and repair toilets, while RM1.4bil had also been allocated for the upgrading of rural government clinics.

The government would also assist petty traders by building proper stalls to enable them to earn a living, said Anwar, adding that he was fortunate that members of his unity government were steadfast in their commit-



Show of hands: Anwar with Form Six students from Negri Sembilan as deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (second from right) and Negri Sembilan menteri besar Datuk Seri Aminuddin Harun gestures along in Nilai. - Bernama

ment to improving the well-being of the people, although they are from different parties.

"That is why we got the ball rolling by cutting ministers' salaries. We need to save this nation.

"We have also, for example, decided that there will be no more middlemen when we acquire equipment for the Defence Ministry," he said, adding that these would only be purchased with advice from ministry experts.

Anwar also slammed critics who were bent on slandering his administration.

Citing an example, he said some members of the Opposition had alleged that he had given away Malaysia's sovereignty when he recently signed a treaty with his Indonesian counterpart President Joko Widodo.

"They claimed that I have compromised Malaysia's rights when in fact there are still some border areas that have yet to be finalised, such as the Ambalat area, Pulau Sebatik near Sabah, and Johor.

"When I ask them which experts they were quoting, they are unable to provide an answer.

"It is sad that such lies and slander are spread by religious scholars who are bent on discrediting the unity government," he said, adding that his political rivals had been using social media to unfairly criticise him on a daily basis.

Prior to this, Anwar had told the Dewan Rakyat that the two treaties signed with Indonesia, which demarcated parts of the two countries' maritime borders, are in accordance with the law and were only signed after consultations were made with government agencies.

The treaties, he said, did not involve territories that were still being disputed.

In his speech at the event, Anwar also said his government had also been criticised for the increase in electricity tariffs, when in fact the previous government had approved this.

"What my government did was to ensure only the super rich, or probably 1% of consumers, would pay more.

"The previous government had actually proposed an increase for all," he said.

Similarly, Anwar said his government was again criticised when it decided to reduce the Haj subsidy for the rich.

"Why should an individual who earns RM50,000 or RM100,000 a month enjoy the same subsidy as others (in the lower income categories)?"

"The money we are able to save is channelled back to the rakyat via the STR (Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah) and e-belia (e-belia Tunai Rahmah) programmes, as they deserve the help," he said.

Anwar said his government's critics had been relentless in slandering his administration, and a recent allegation claiming that DAP's Seputeh MP Teresa Kok was to be made Felda chairman was another example.

"This is the situation we are in, and I pray that we remain safe from such slander," he said.