

Anwar's third budget the main draw

Budget 2025 among a flurry of Bills to be tabled as Dewan Rakyat reconvenes

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PETALING JAYA: Next Friday, all eyes will be on the Dewan Rakyat, where Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is poised to table the Supply Bill, or Budget 2025.

It remains to be seen whether Anwar's third full-fledged spending plan would be expansionary and larger than the previous years, or driven by austerity.

The government budget will be tabled for the second reading on Oct 18, four days after the House convenes for its third meeting for the year on Monday.

A flurry of Bills is expected to be tabled during this 35-day meeting, including the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2024. The controversial Bill, which seeks to amend citizenship laws, is listed for a second reading on the Dewan Rakyat's Order Paper.

It was previously meant to be tabled for the second reading by Home Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail on March 27.

However, after Saifuddin delivered his speech, Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Johari Abdul adjourned the meeting without putting the Bill forward for debate.

It was also not brought up for second reading throughout the June-July meeting of the House.

Civil society groups oppose the Bill in its current form, arguing that it contains several regressive amendments, including the absence of retroactive application.

They say the only positive in the Bill is the provision allowing Malaysian mothers to automatically confer citizenship on their children born overseas.

During a special media briefing yesterday, Saifuddin confirmed that the Bill in question will be presented in the upcoming

Dewan Rakyat meeting.

He said the Home Ministry has taken the feedback from various stakeholders, including civil society groups, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia and legal experts, in the process of improving the provisions in the Bill.

The Mufti (Federal Territories) and the Administration of Islamic Law (Federal Territories) (Amendment) Bill 2024, which was postponed in the previous meeting, has also been listed for the second reading.

However, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) Datuk Dr Mohd Na'im Mokhtar reportedly said yesterday that the third Bill, Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965 (Amendment) Bill, will not be tabled in the upcoming meeting.

Other Bills listed on the House's order of business are the Energy Transition and Water Transform-

ation Ministry's Water Services Industry (Amendment) Bill 2024; Transport Ministry's Commercial Vehicles Licensing Board (Amendment) Bill 2024; and amendments to the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998.

The Online Safety and the Malaysian Media Council Bills are also expected to be tabled by the end of the meeting.

The Online Safety Bill aims to bolster Malaysia's legal framework to address issues such as cyberbullying, online scams, and the misuse of digital platforms.

The Health Ministry's Prevention and Control of Infectious Disease (Amendment) Bill 2024, another Bill which was in limbo, is also listed on the House's order of business.

Dr Tunku Mohar Tunku Mohd Mokhtar of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IUM) stated that Budget 2025 is expected to be passed without

any issues.

"I think Budget debates will focus on the government's handling of the economy and efforts at addressing cost of living issues," the political pundit said when contacted.

"Another potentially controversial bill concerns online safety. While it aims to protect consumers, the opposition may argue that it represents government control over online media," he added.

Singapore Institute of International Affairs senior fellow Dr Oh Ei Sun said the Opposition will be gearing up for battle once Budget 2025 is tabled.

The draft Bill to revive the Parliamentary Services Act (PSA) is also expected in the upcoming meeting.

According to the Dewan Rakyat's calendar, Bills will be tabled from Dec 4 until the meeting concludes on Dec 12.