

Allocation for MPs' pay hike withdrawn from Budget 2012
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 10 — Putrajaya has withdrawn its plan to hike the salaries of MPs following objections raised by several opposition lawmakers.

Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz announced today that he had decided to withdraw the RM30 million allocated in Budget 2012 after reading numerous news reports that the lawmakers were against the proposal.

But the minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of parliamentary affairs expressed disappointment at the apparent disunity among MPs over the proposal, which was presented to him last Wednesday by a bipartisan "parliamentary review committee".

Nazri (picture) explained that he had pleaded for the inclusion of the committee's proposal to Datuk Seri Najib Razak last Friday morning, barely hours before the prime minister was due to table Budget 2012 in Parliament.

He said that at the time he was under the impression that all MPs, including those from Barisan Nasional (BN), Pakatan Rakyat (PR) and independent representatives, were in support of the plan, due to the bipartisan composition of the committee.

Following his persuasion, Nazri said Najib had agreed to the proposal on condition that all MPs backed the move.

"I apologise to the prime minister for my failure to live up to the expectation. I failed to obtain the support of all MPs," Nazri told a press conference here.

He listed PR "bigwigs" like Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Lim Guan Eng and Azmin Ali as some of those who objected to the pay hike proposal.

The leaders, said Nazri, had rejected the proposal without first consulting their more junior MPs, whom he said were struggling to serve their constituents with their salaries.

"Of course, this is nothing to them (the leaders) but for their junior MPs who are struggling to pay for petrol, to visit their constituencies... they are the ones I am thinking of," he said.

He told the disappointed lawmakers not to blame him for the withdrawal, saying he had done his part by convincing Najib to include an allocation for the hike in Budget 2012.

"It is not like the money will make us rich... the thing with these MPs is that whatever money that is put into their pocket, they have to spend it for their constituents," he said.

Nazri explained that the pay hike proposal had incorporated the MPs' need to hire researchers for their parliamentary work, rental for their service centres, drivers and office assistants.

"These are the things MPs need. If they had agreed to it, it would have taken care of their

researchers, their offices, their drivers... because I do not want these MPs to have to pay these employees with their salaries. It is not fair, but they opened their mouth too fast and now I am not able to deliver my part of the promise to the prime minister," he said.

Nazri, however, added the proposal from the committee would still be presented to the House and could still be deliberated on in time for the next budget.

MPs' salaries have been revised five times — in 1992, 1997, 2001, 2002 and 2005 — since the Members of Parliament (Remuneration) Bill was enacted in 1980. In the 2005 amendment, their basic salaries increased from RM5,916.90 in 2002 to RM6,508.59, not inclusive of other benefits such as a RM1,200 driver allowance.

Nazri noted that Malaysian MPs were among the lowest paid in Asean and the world with lawmakers in Singapore earning RM33,589 a month while Indonesian MPs earn RM18,111.89 and those in Thailand earn between RM12,534 and RM12,539 a month, according to seniority.

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