

Anwar wants special Parliament meet if GDP aim unmet
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 10 — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim today demanded Parliament reconvene for a “special sitting” if Putrajaya fails to meet its “unreasonable” gross domestic product (GDP) growth forecast.

The opposition leader today poured cold water over Datuk Seri Najib Razak’s Budget 2012 tabled on Friday, claiming the prime minister’s predictions and his administration’s alleged penchant for unbridled spending would likely worsen the country’s deficit.

Anwar also predicted the Najib administration would table a supplementary supply bill by mid-2012, seeking for additional funds just as it did in June this year.

Putrajaya tabled an RM13 billion supplementary supply bill during the June parliamentary sitting for additional spending in the first half of the year, listing an extra RM6 billion spent by the Treasury, RM1.5 billion by the Education Ministry and RM1 billion by the Health Ministry.

“The Umno-Barisan Nasional (BN) government should not assume the people are so easily fooled by these data used.

“The figures shown (in Budget 2012) give the picture that the deficit situation and federal debt is under control, when we are all aware of BN’s habit of tabling a supplementary supply bill by mid-year,” he told the House today when debating the Budget.

He then urged Parliament to set a condition for a special sitting to be convened should Malaysia’s economy fail to hit its 5.5 per cent growth target for 2011 and 6 per cent for the first quarter of next year.

“Dewan (Rakyat) must reconvene to slash the proposed RM232.8 billion budget tabled on October 7 and revise it to RM220 billion, as proposed in Pakatan Rakyat’s (PR) alternative budget,” he said.

Anwar said 78 per cent of Budget 2012 was allocated for government administrative expenses, a “high sum that continues to increase yearly and, if left unchecked, will force the decrease of allocations for development and investments”.

He pointed out that 11 ministries were granted higher administrative allocations for 2012 even as their development budgets shrank.

“I would like to question, why are there no measures taken to limit the operational expenditure of ministries, which until today have not been controlled?” said Anwar.

The Permatang Pauh MP also downplayed the decision to scrap primary and secondary

school fees beginning 2012, pointing out that Putrajaya had slashed the Education Ministry's operational expenditure by three per cent and development expenditure by 28 per cent to accommodate the move.

"The prime minister also behaved as if Malaysia's economy is picking up by boasting of foreign direct investments (FDI) in 2010 and the first half of 2011. Unfortunately, he only mentioned Malaysia's performance without comparing with global investment flows or other competing nations in the region," he said.

Anwar cited the findings in the "FDI Global Outlook" released recently by the Financial Times, and noted that Malaysia had failed to make the list as one of Asia Pacific's top five investment destinations.

He said Malaysia was also bogged down by a staggering federal debt, which he said hit RM437 billion by the end June this year — the highest in the country's history.

The former finance minister then cast doubt on the long-term viability of "sweeteners" offered in Budget 2012, which included hikes in civil servants' pensions and wages as well as numerous cash assistance packages, including handouts to school students and lower-income households.

"I advise the prime minister not to smile too long because the people know that such payments are only one-off payments in 2012, are not long lasting and are merely sweeteners.

"If they consume these sweeteners, after the polls, the people will have to return these payments through the goods and services tax (GST) introduced by the prime minister," he said.

Speaking to reporters outside the House later, Anwar reiterated fears that the volatile economic situation would likely affect Najib's "ambitious" projections for the Malaysian economy.

"I just want to emphasise the importance of a responsible figure, data, projection by the finance minister because it is untenable to assume that one can just put up figures like growth expectations which is completely unreasonable [and] rejected by analysts and economists in the country.

"So I have called upon the House to consider the possibility of having a special session to debate if we find that the projection by the finance minister on growth, on FDI, on deficit and on government revenue depart substantially from the one he announced on Friday," he said.

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