

Malaysians blessed under BN despite economic dip, says Najib
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HULU LANGAT, Aug 21 — Despite a slowing economy, Datuk Seri Najib Razak said today Malaysians were blessed as the government could afford to give bonuses to civil servants while Western countries faced financial troubles.

The prime minister also pointed out that the Barisan Nasional (BN) government strove to reduce the cost of living, such as by launching Kedai Rakyat 1 Malaysia thrift stores in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya.

"I want to tell you that when the rakyat is prioritised, we want to do anything so that the people will feel that their burdens are lighter," said Najib in a speech at a buka puasa function here.

"The opposition always says the prices of goods go up under BN. But they should say the prices are going down instead because in 1 Malaysia stores, we can buy goods 40 per cent lower than normal prices," he added.

The Najib administration will pay out a half-month bonus to 1.3 million civil servants and RM500 to 600,000 government pensioners ahead of Hari Raya amid public concern over rising inflation.

The government gave a similar bonus last year in a country that has yet to implement a minimum wage.

Hari Raya Aidil Fitri, which falls at the end of the month, is expected to see muted celebrations after the consumer price index hit a two-year high of three per cent in March and continued to rise to 3.5 per cent in June, when government subsidies for basic necessities were slashed.

Malaysia chalked its fifth consecutive decline in GDP growth last quarter, decelerating to its slowest pace of 4 per cent since the 2009 recession.

The Malaysian economy grew 7.2 per cent in 2010 as it rebounded from the global economic slowdown in 2009. The global economy this year, however, has been shaken by the spread of the euro zone debt problem to Italy and Spain and by fears that the recovery of the US economy may be faltering.

Najib pointed out today that the US was beleaguered with large debt, falling stocks, and a high unemployment rate of more than nine per cent.

"Some European countries, although they are developed countries, are considered insolvent because of heavy debt burdens...but in Malaysia, thank God, not only can we pay salaries, we can also give out half-month bonuses to civil servants," the PM said.

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