

Pakatan promotes shadow budget drive, avoids negative polls campaign
The Malaysian Insider
October 21, 2011
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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 21 — The Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leadership has directed its members to focus on an all-out promotion of its shadow budget plans and avoid any form of negative campaigning ahead of the next general election expected soon.

The Malaysian Insider understands that PR leaders have received specific instructions about the contents of their weekly ceramahs — everything is now geared towards the opposition's policies and framework, and how the pact's budget is more viable and cost-effective than Barisan Nasional's (BN) recently-tabled Budget 2012.

PR leaders have also been reminded to cease attacks against leaders of the national coalition and will now divide their ceramahs into two parts — providing constituents in each state a better understanding of its alternative budget as well as "customised" local issues such as land rights and cost of living.

"We will no longer be focused on simply attacking the BN government, no running off with our mouths, we want to be clear, and provide a better manifesto for Pakatan Rakyat. It's now all about which coalition can provide better growth, revenue and minimise deficit and debt," PKR secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution (picture) told The Malaysian Insider in an interview.

"In 2008, campaigning was only on issues related to crime, restoration of democratic institutions. But we know how to better explain to people, especially rural folk about our plans should we take over federal and will make them understand how we can be a better option than BN through our policy approach," said the Machang MP.

He said PKR was now working alongside the "younger" and up-and-coming leaders such as vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar, party chief strategist Rafizi Ramli as well as communications director Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad in active campaigns across rural areas throughout the country.

The pact has also taken extra steps to present its shadow budget to rural constituents in a more "simplified" manner, whereby comparisons between PR and BN's budget plans have been condensed into simple point form, slideshow formats.

PR will also distribute leaflets on its budget to areas where it is unable conduct any ceramahs.

As Saifuddin described it, politics was all about "perception", and the campaign overdrive was necessary to inform people that PR has a concrete plan on how to run the federal government.

"Gone are the days when you can say 'orang kampung tak faham bab ekonomi' (kampung folk don't understand economics). They want to know what we plan to do with taxpayers' money, how we can optimise growth with careful spending.

"So we simplify it via point form for them if they don't understand. We give facts and figures. Numbers don't lie," said the PKR lawmaker.

Saifuddin said the pact will also use the "success" stories of four PR state governments in Penang, Selangor, Kedah and Kelantan as proof of its capability to govern effectively after receiving positive comments from last year's Auditor-General's report.

"We want people to know that our budget puts an emphasis on the 40 per cent of the country's population that is earning below RM3,000. Our budget is for the low-wage earners," he added.

Putrajaya has predicted a five to six per cent growth projection for 2012, and defended it by saying it was within "reasonable bounds".

In his Budget 2012 proposals, Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak promised cash handouts, more money for civil servants, schools and a fund for "high-impact development" projects as part of measures to put money in the pockets of the majority of Malaysians who live in the lower-income group.

The government will offer a one-off RM500 cash handout to households with a monthly income of less than RM3,000, a RM100 cash aid and RM200 book vouchers for students from the Budget, which is forecast to only have a 4.7 per cent fiscal deficit, down from the projected 5.4 per cent this year.

The authorities will trim development spending and maintain subsidies to keep prices down, while banking on low borrowing costs and a healthy job market to keep economic growth on an even keel next year.

Budget 2012 funds for subsidies are expected to total RM33.2 billion.

The PM has also called PR's shadow budget a "right-wing Republican" budget that fails to address the needs of the people, saying it only focuses on the budget gap and national debt but makes no mention of public welfare.

Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has however warned Najib that a spendthrift budget will only set Malaysia "on course" to breach the national debt limit.

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