

**Pakatan promises affordable housing, after cheaper cars, free education**  
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**By Hafidz Baharom**

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 21 — Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) budget proposals next week will highlight affordable housing, a touchy subject that urbanites and unionists have asked the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) to act on as house prices are rising faster than income levels.

The federal opposition coalition had earlier promised to slash vehicles prices and offer free tertiary education, and the move on housing prices is seen as a sweetener to win more support to capture Putrajaya in the next general election which must be held by middle 2013.

PKR strategy director Rafizi Ramli said the PR budget proposals, to be unveiled on September 24 by Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, will address the two issues which are driving housing prices up.

"The first reason is speculation. There is no denying that Barisan Nasional has been trying to counter this by controlling credit for housing but this textbook style in dealing with the issue is too late," he told The Malaysian Insider, saying credit restrictions were not working as speculators no longer approached banks for funds and instead pooled their resources.

Rafizi said PR's budget proposals will be backed up by background costing. Rafizi said there was also a need to regulate developers who hand out rebates and discounts after setting prices.

"They (developers) give so many rebates and discounts and deducting all this, suddenly you find that the house is only RM900,000.

"But because the initial value was a million, it pushes up the base line for housing prices," he added.

He said there were a lot of "nitty gritty items" needing review, adding that BN's handling of the crisis was not detailed and thorough enough to curb speculation.

"The government has also abdicated the role of providing housing to private contractors, so now we in PR have to look at different ways to balance the supply for affordable housing," Rafizi said, adding that there was no drive for contractors to build affordable houses.

He said that instead of Putrajaya's move to guarantee aid to first-time homeowners through the My First Home Scheme announced in Budget 2012, PR would look into increasing the supply of affordable housing but added that the issue would not be resolved overnight.

"We won't see any effects until the third year because this problem cannot be solved quickly, even in one or two years," said the trained accountant, adding it was a matter of cost and cashflow.

"BN would never admit to this, but whenever we come out with a policy, we will always give a proper cashflow along with it. So I can assure everyone that the plan is sound," Rafizi said.

He added that proposals in the PR budget will be backed up by background costing and would not be including the earlier policies promised by the opposition pact.

"The onus is on us to prove that our plans are viable, as we have done with our car policy and even with our PTPTN policy; the figures and cashflow we provide will tally," Rafizi said.

He also hinted that PR's affordable housing plan would incorporate reforms done in Penang, where the PR government is led by DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng, another trained accountant.

"In Penang, they have actually done some radical shifts in regards to ownership and this will also be combined into our housing policy.

"Penang has looked into this matter and come up with some creative solutions which we will incorporate into our own budget," Rafizi added.

He also said it was PR's "greatest achievement to date" to have forced the BN government to compete on policies.

"The public deserves to know what both sides can offer, to compare and evaluate what each side can manage if given the same amount of resources.

"If PR is given the opportunity to govern, I am sure we can do better than BN in managing the same resources," he said.

While PR is giving details of its budget proposals on September 24, Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak is due to table his Budget 2013 proposals on September 28 and it is expected to be an election budget with more allocations for ministries and the public.

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