

Malaysia's score on government budget improves, but still relatively low, survey shows
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Malaysia has scored relatively low on a well-regarded global survey on government budgeting, said a think tank, ranking it even behind countries such as Papua New Guinea in terms of public participation and transparency in how the government spends taxpayers' money.

Malaysia's score improved in terms of oversight of the budget in the Open Budget Survey 2015 due to the strength of the Auditor-General's Office, said the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs

Nevertheless, the survey still found very little oversight of the budget by lawmakers.

"Malaysia's scores for budget transparency was 46 out of 100, which is an improvement from the 2012 score of 39.

"However, this is still a relatively low score as it means that the Malaysian government provides only limited information to the public," IDEAS said in a statement today.

The Open Budget Survey uses criteria developed by world bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (Intosai).

The survey scores 102 countries on three elements, transparency (how it makes key budget documents publicly available) and public participation (how much the government allows public input).

The third element, oversight has two measurements, how strong and independent audit institutions are and whether legislature, such as Parliament, is allowed to oversee the budget and its implementation.

Ideas chief executive Wan Saiful Wan Jan said the results were mixed in 2015 and the improvement in seven points (in the transparency component) is hardly substantial.

The low scores on public participation and oversight by the legislature show that MPs don't really have a chance to influence how taxpayer money is spent, Wan Saiful said.

"And it is particularly bad when it comes to public participation. We scored 12 out of 100, which is two points above Timor Leste and half of Papua New Guinea's score."

Malaysia scored 46 out of 100 on the transparency component as the government only provides five out of eight documents that are key to the budget formulation process, Ideas said.

A score of 46 is an improvement from the score of 39 in the 2012 survey, but is still rated as "limited". In comparison, the Philippines scored 64, Indonesia 59 and Papua New Guinea 55.

Another Ideas officer, Sri Murniati, said Malaysia's improvement in the transparency score was mainly due to the fact that the AG's report is now tabled three times a year at every Parliamentary sitting.

In terms of public participation, Malaysia scored 12 out of 100, which is rated as weak and is lower than the global average score of 25. It is behind almost all its Asean neighbours, with Cambodia and Myanmar being the exception.

Malaysia scored 67 out 100 in terms of oversight of the budget by a supreme audit institution, and survey terms the Auditor-General's Department as adequate in its ability to check government spending.

However, the country received a weak rating, 15 out of 100, when it comes to legislative oversight, meaning that Parliament has little ability to monitor the planning stage of the budget and is unable to see how funds are spent.

"There are only four countries that have posted excellent scores in all components, South Africa, Brazil, Norway and the United States," said Sri Murniati, who is Ideas's manager of political economy and governance. – September 10, 2015.

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