

**Budget 2017: Inclusive Prudent Spending, Wellbeing of Rakyat
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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 21 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak today tabled the 2017 Budget which stresses inclusive prudent spending towards the wellbeing of the "rakyat" (people) in facing the challenging economy which is being tested by uncertainty at the global level.

Themed "Ensuring Unity and Economic Growth, Inclusive Prudent Spending, Wellbeing of the Rakyat", Najib, who is also Finance Minister, proposed several steps and key strategies to face these challenges.

The 2017 Budget proposed a provision of RM260.8 billion, RM214.8 billion for operating expenditure and RM46 billion for development expenditure.

In tabling the 65-page budget, Najib also said that the total did not include contingency reserves of RM2 billion.

Najib also said that for the past 60 years, the Parti Perikatan and now, the Barisan Nasional Government had successfully sustained the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth at an average of six per cent per annum.

This is the eighth budget presented by Najib since he took over as prime minister and also Finance Minister.

Najib said the 2017 Budget was anchored on five principles and philosophies of the government including giving priority to national integration in forming a nation state, preserving sovereignty, upholding the Constitution and laws as well as national security.

He said the important concept which was stressed in the 2017 Budget with Malaysia heading to be a developed country was "public happiness".

"This budget is not only merely about income but is related to quality of life, such as free from crime, enjoying a clean environment, with various colourful arts and cultures," he said.

The concept also stresses attaining higher education, uplifting academia and intellectual prowess; health care that is assured apart from having access to a public transportation system that was efficient, he said.

The prime minister said that for the people's wellbeing, the government would continue to implement projects and programmes that are 'people-centric' in urban and rural areas.

In the 2017 Budget, he among others proposed the installation of 97,000 street lights and 3,000 LED lights in 7,500 kampungs and provide RM300 million under the 1Malaysia Maintenance Fund to repair facilities at flat areas and 113 People's Housing Projects in urban areas and the suburbs.

Najib said that following the various incentives from stimulus packages as well as seven previous Budgets, Malaysia's economy remained stable and on a positive trajectory.

"Through measures and initiatives implemented by the government, our economy records sustainable growth. According to the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), Malaysia is now an upper middle-income country, surpassing many countries not only in Asia but also throughout the world," he said.

According to him, Malaysia PPP per capita had increased from USD23,100 in 2012 to USD26,891 in 2015.

Najib also dismissed the misperception by certain quarters that Malaysia will become bankrupt.

He said based on ratings by reputable international agencies like Fitch which gave A-, Malaysia was in the same group with advanced and larger economies such as South Korea, China, Japan and Taiwan.

"This means, bankruptcy is never in Malaysia's economic dictionary," he said.

Najib also said that allegations that Malaysia is a failed state was a false accusation.

He clarified that it referred to a country that failed to implement most of its responsibilities and basic functions of a government.

"This includes the failure of police and armed forces in maintaining national security and public order of the country; failure of the Government to pay salaries of civil servants; failure in providing basic amenities such as water and electricity as well as failure to prevent hyperinflation that could collapse the economy.

"These characteristics do not exist in Malaysia! This Government will never allow our country to become a failed state," he said.

His speech was disturbed by opposition MPs when he touched on claims that the 2017 Budget was a "all drama and without any substance" and that the government did not have sufficient funds.

The uproar lasted a while longer when Najib questioned who were the real drama actors, rebels and traitors.

When the noise settled down, Najib read out a poem as follows:

Ribut-ribut di Kubang Pasu,

Angin Sepoi dari Pekan,

Demi negara Barisan Nasional Bersatu,

Kepentingan rakyat kita utamakan.

English version of poem:

Stormy weather in Kubang Pasu,

In Pekan, whispers a soothing breeze,

United Barisan Nasional, for the country,

We are through and through,

And we first put the rakyat's needs.

In the 2017 Budget, Najib also had good news for civil servants whereby all would receive special assistance of RM500 while Government retirees would get RM250 with the payments to be made in early January 2017.

He also announced several other incentives for civil servants including raising housing loan eligibility to RM200,000-RM750,000, extending the computer purchase facility to include smartphones with the limit set at RM5,000 every three years and the introduction of Grade 56 for medical and dental specialists.

Najib also announced a raise in the rate of the 1Malaysia People's Aid (BR1M) which will benefit seven million people entailing an allocation of RM6.8 billion.

He also proposed several measures to increase home ownership, among them building 5,000 units of MyBeautiful New Home priced at RM40,000-RM50,000 a unit for the B40 group and 30,000 units on government land at strategic locations with the price ranging from RM150,000 to RM300,000.

In the budget, Najib also proposed an allocation of RM25 billion for health care including medical assistance to 10,000 less fortunate patients (RM70 million); supply of medication, consumables, vaccines and reagents (RM4 billion) and a one-off grant of RM200,000 for purchase of equipment at new private haemodialysis centres.

Najib also drew attention to the field of education in the 2017 budget by proposing schooling assistance of RM100 to each student from families earning up to RM3,000, Special Needs Student Allowance of RM150 monthly to 67,000 Students and provision of tablets for assisting teaching to 430,000 teachers.

To strengthen higher education, Najib proposed a sum of RM7.4 billion to 20 public universities.

He also proposed that book vouchers be replaced with a student debit card worth RM250 to purchase books, computer accessories and internet access, benefiting 1.3 million students.

Scholarships will continue to be awarded with an allocation of RM4.4 billion including through the

Public Service Department (JPA), MARA, the Higher Education Ministry, Health Ministry, Education Ministry, Human Resource Ministry and Youth and Sports Ministry.

In the Government's commitment to protect vulnerable groups, Najib in the 2017 Budget proposed financial assistance to poor families including General Assistance up to RM300 per month and Children Assistance up to RM450 per month.

Najib also announced that the government would launch a national discourse series known as Transformasi Nasional 2050 which will be rebranded as TN50 after Budget 2017 is concluded.

He said the TN50 will span three decades to form a calibre nation state as well as with par excellent mindset.

The Prime Minister said TN50, which will be under his patronage, will be kick-started by the young diverse generation of all races through national discourse as decided by the Cabinet and conducted by the Youth and Sports Ministry.

"Let the TN50 bear witness, be recorded in history that we are the responsible Citizens and Forefathers, to leave behind the best and greatest legacy to be inherited by future generations.

"From now on, TN50 is our lucky charm. Let the old legacy pass. The future of Malaysia, we Recreate," he added.

Najib said the initiative, allocations and noble intention of the Barisan Nasional (BN) in the 2017 Budget is 'For the people, Because of the People'.

The budget is the government's total commitment and not just seeking political popularity but instead the country's economic fundamentals stay strong.

"The Barisan Nasional government will stand firm like a warrior and will not back down or run away from challenges or problems," he said.

Najib who is also the BN chairman said the victory of the Sarawak State Election had blown over the Sungai Besar and Kuala Kangsar by-election victories and eventually be the torch of endeavour which we believe, will bring the ultimate victory in the 14th General Election with the blessing of the All Mighty.

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