Insightful input on what the people want

The Star

It is fascinating to see how the public responds when invited to give input on what should be in the national budget. Although this has been a practice for several years, it continues to be a useful and enlightening glimpse into the expectations of Malaysians.

Over 15 days last month, people could go to https://budget2018.malaysia.gov.my to post suggestions that may be taken into account when the Government finalises the country’s proposed budget for next year.

In his capacity as Finance Minister, Prime Minister Baru seri Najib Tun Razak will table Budget 2018 in Parliament on Oct 27. It will be interesting to see if the proposal incorporates elements from the “crowdsourcing campaign”.

Even if the budget does not contain any of the feedback, when people are given a platform to see their views on government spending and projects, interesting things happen.

For one thing, the suggestions flowed freely, thanks partly to online anonymity.

Almost 44,000 ideas were offered when the website was live between Sept 4 and Sept 18.

That came to an average of more than 900 per day.

Naturally this wish list of the public is a mixture of self-interest and altruism. There is also the contrast between practicality and idealism.

The suggestions range from realistic requests to shoot for the stars.

This merely reflects the diversity of a nation.

The submissions are sorted into 14 categories: cost of living; housing and urban living; healthcare; transport and infrastructure; rural development; education; public safety and security; youth and sports; social welfare (the disabled and disadvantaged); environment and agriculture; employment, taxation, business and finance; culture and tourism; and the digital economy.

It is apparent that grand and grander ideas are uppermost in the minds of many Malaysians.

Based on each category’s number of pages per the site’s so-called “Gallery of Ideas,” people were most eager to have their say on matters relating to employment. Also among the top five categories were taxation, business and finance (3rd highest number of submissions) and cost of living (5th).

Education was the second most popular topic and fourth was transport and infrastructure.

In a blog post on Sept 28, Najib singled out three ideas. The first was a suggestion that the Klang River be cleaned up and developed into a main waterway that connects towns along the river.

The second proposal was for Tenaga Nasional Bhd to work with village folks to install solar panels in their homes so that the villagers can earn from the electricity generated.

The third idea that the prime minister highlighted was an appeal to the Government to improve Internet access and speed in rural areas so that the people there can move deeper into the digital economy.

There must surely be plenty more noteworthy ideas and suggestions among the 13,857 posts on https://budget2018.malaysia.gov.my.

When people are encouraged to contribute their thoughts and are given the space to do so, we all stand to benefit ultimately.