

PM trims ministerial entertainment allowances

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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak will reduce the entertainment allowance of ministers, deputy ministers and top government officers by 10 percent.

According to Bernama, Najib said this policy is among 11 new measures that are to be introduced to reduce public sector expenditure.

The new policy will be implemented on Jan 1, 2014.

Other measures include:

- Limiting civil servants below the grade of Jusa C to economy class on domestic flights;

- Reducing electricity cost for all government premises by five percent;

- Freezing fresh applications for renovation of government offices;

- Tightening the appointment procedure for government consultants;

- Cutting down on the use of event management companies and the giving of door gifts and souvenirs;

- Cutting down on food and beverages, buntings and banners at government functions; and

- Utilising the 1Malaysia Training Centre (1MTC) for training sessions and seminars.

These austerity measures were announced just a day before tomorrow's scheduled demonstration at Dataran Merdeka against government policies that have led to a recent rise in prices of essential goods.

Najib's Facebook page has also been recently inundated with messages condemning his government for failing to keep a lid on inflation and its expenditures.

Following Pak Lah's playbook?

It is believed that this is Najib's first ever austerity drive, but it appears reminiscent of measures announced by his predecessor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in June 2008.

In fact, many of these measures such as trimming ministerial entertainment allowances, freezing of renovation work for government buildings, limiting travel perks for civil servants and limiting government functions to government facilities were announced by Abdullah before.

These measures - intended to reduce government expenditure by RM2 billion - were introduced after the Abdullah administration raised fuel prices shortly after the 12th general election.

Abdullah's austerity drive did not do much to save his career. He was ousted in a complicated succession plan and replaced by Najib.

As for Najib, he had raised fuel and sugar prices immediately after the 13th general election, which has led to a spiraling inflationary effect.

Next year, the costs of more essential goods and services - among others, highway toll charges, electricity and public transport fares - are scheduled to go up.

Currently, several civil society groups and opposition parties are planning a drawn-out campaign against the government's subsidy removal policies, culminating in the protest against the goods and services tax (GST), scheduled for May 1.

However, the government's response is that its opponents are moving to hold a Arab Spring-type of demonstration tomorrow, which is aimed at creating chaos to topple BN in Putrajaya.

However, critics have pointed out that there has been no concrete proof of this and have accused the federal government of trying to create a diversion from public anger over the rising cost of living.