

## **PM's 'sympathy' towards rakyat rings hollow**

**MalaysiaKini.com**

**Jan 2, 2014**

MP SPEAKS After months of silence over the impending and compounding multiple price hikes, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak finally found it appropriate to express his "understanding" and his "sympathy" towards the rakyat for the hardships that they are facing.

The prime minister expressed in his 2014 New Year message that he "understands and sympathises" with these concerns.

"Hardworking people will feel the impact of rising costs. And when the media is full of red numbers and price rises, it can seem as though 2014 will bring pain without gain," he had said.

However, it is obvious that these words were meant only to calm the anger and frustrations of the man-on-the-street after months of criticism leading up to the 'Turun' protest held on New Year's Eve.

The "sympathy" rings hollow in the face of no substantive action being taken by the government to reduce cost of living for the rakyat.

If the prime minister isn't shedding crocodile tears, then there are some very simple policy measures he can announce immediately to mitigate the burden the rakyat is carrying.

For a start, the government must start reviewing the toll agreement with the highway concessionaires who are making astronomical profits, but are "entitled" to further increase in toll rates.

As an example, Lingkar Trans Kota Sdn Bhd (Litrak), which owns Lebuhraya Damansara Puchong (LDP) that was built for a cost of RM1.3 billion, made operating profits of RM282 million for its year ending Mar 31, 2013, before deducting financing cost and income tax of RM89 million and RM48 million respectively.

The question is why should the government allow the concessionaire to continue reaping such hefty profits on an annual basis for another 16 years until 2029?

Implement Pakatan Rakyat manifesto

More tellingly, despite the clause in these toll concession agreements which allow the government to buy back the highways practically at the cost of construction, the BN administration has steadfastly refused to conduct the necessary buy back, but prefers to allow these highway companies to milk the commuters with higher toll rates, or pay massive compensation with the tax-payers' money.

Similarly, the government has shown no resolve to reduce the cost of basic necessities such as rice, sugar and petrol which are currently government-sponsored monopolies, which blocks competition.

Why should national rice company Bernas, which is a privately-owned entity, be allowed to monopolise the countries entire local and imported rice distribution?

Similarly, why should only two companies be allowed to import, manufacture and sell sugar when the government has removed all subsidies for sugar?

Or why are petrol companies not allowed to sell petrol at prices lower than that fixed by the government, even if one of the five "competing" companies is willing to do so?

Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB) made RM5.9 billion in profit before tax for the financial year ending Aug 31, 2013.

And yet the Najib administration has acceded to TNB's demand to increase tariffs because allegedly even the 15 percent increase "isn't enough" to fund TNB's investments.

Najib has earlier stated that he needs to make "tough decisions" to "protect the economy".

The prime minister does indeed need to make tough decisions by starting the above proposed policies - which are part of the Pakatan Rakyat manifesto - instead of making the easy decision to place the burden squarely on the shoulders of the rakyat.

If the prime minister insists on prioritising the obscene profits of his government's cronies over the livelihood of the rakyat, then he should save his crocodile tears for those who may need to sacrifice their use of private jets to give "important" speeches overseas or to the foreign dignitaries who may have to dine in candlelight at his official residence to reduce the RM2 million annual electricity bill.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd  
Source: <http://beta.malaysiakini.com/news/250708>