

62pct M'sians reject GST, reveals poll
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Merdeka Centre said today that 62 percent of Malaysians surveyed have rejected the Goods and Services Tax (GST) despite the government's decades-long planning and recent publicity campaign on its benefits.

The survey of 1,009 registered voters adhering to the country's ethnic composition, also revealed that one in two did not understand what GST was all about.

An even larger proportion - 64 percent of those surveyed from Apr 12 to Apr 21 - had no clue how the economy works.

"This view was more prevalent among respondents coming from lower income households, rural areas and among women," the survey released by Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research said.

The independent pollster noted that as much as 39 percent said they "strongly disagreed" with GST. Some of them were probably at the May 1 rally in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, where over 50,000 people thronged Dataran Merdeka and staged a peaceful, albeit short sit-in protest.

Surprisingly, it was not students and the unemployed who dreaded the new tax the most but businesses.

The survey noted that the highest proportion of those who disagreed with GST, 68 percent were self-employed.

This is despite the government spending millions on software to help ease the process of collecting GST.

The survey also revealed that even among civil servants and employees of government-linked corporations, 53 percent also rejected GST. The government today threatened to sack civil servants who took part in yesterday's anti-GST rally as it went against the government's aspirations.

The survey interviewed Malays, Chinese and Indian Malaysians over the phone.

It found that Malays had the lowest understanding of GST, with 62 percent - more than the overall 53 percent mark - saying that they didn't really understand the GST.

The reverse was true for Indians surveyed, with 65 percent agreeing that they understood the tax, which would start at six percent from April 2015.

A new GST bill was passed in Parliament last month.

Prior to that, the government had first introduced a GST bill in 2009 but subsequently withdrew it a year later due to protests and then spent more years educating the people about the tax.

Poorest have least understanding

Even though the GST was expected to hit the poor hardest and the government has promised to handout cash through Bantuan Rakyat1Malaysia (BR1M) to help, the survey found that the poorest still understood the least about the consumption tax.

Merdeka Centre said that nearly three-quarters of households earning less than RM1,500 a month did not understand GST and the same proportion said they didn't have follow the national economy at all.

Promoters of the GST have said that it is bitter medicine but it was for the long term health of the Malaysian economy.

It would help cure a huge national debt accumulated by the BN government, which has also spent more than it has collected over the last 15 years. The government expected to earn over RM3 billion more a year from GST.

But the Merdeka Centre survey also showed that most people didn't know this too.

The survey said that 59 percent of Malaysians did not know what was the "government fiscal deficit issue" being talked about. Only four percent could say they knew a great deal about such issues.

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