

Why raise fuel prices when crude price is down?

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Petrol prices should have gone down, not up, opposition lawmakers said today, since crude oil prices fell in late June, from US\$66 per barrel to around US\$62 per barrel yesterday.

As such, Pandan MP Rafizi Ramli said, instead of going up by 10 sen a litre to RM2.15, the RON95 price should have fallen closer to the RM1.70 level of February this year, when crude oil was priced at US\$60 per barrel.

"This means that when crude oil prices fell to near US\$60 per barrel as at the end of June, the price of RON95 should be lowered close to RM1.70 per litre.

"However, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's administration raised the price of RON95 yesterday, going against the current crude oil price," Rafizi (photo) said.

Petrol prices went up effective today, with RON97 up by 20 sen to RM2.55 a litre.

The government has not explained the latest petrol hike, and has adopted a policy not to issue advance announcements on changes in petrol prices.

'Gov't not serious about protecting the people'

In a separate statement, Temerloh MP Nasrudin Hassan Tantawi slammed this new policy, while agreeing that petrol prices should be lower.

"This again proves the government is not serious about protecting the people, what more to take constructive steps to lessen their burdens," Nasrudin (photo) said, noting that the fuel hike would lead to more expensive goods.

As such, he said, the government should cancel the fuel price hike immediately.

Rafizi echoed this view, adding that the people were being made to pay for Najib's failure to strengthen the ringgit.

He also called for the government to reinstate petrol subsidies of at least 30 sen per litre.

This, the PKR vice-president said, would cost the government just RM3 billion if it is implemented from August.

Rafizi added the government could pay off the subsidies with the RM10 billion that he claimed it has collected from fuel taxes, as well as from the goods and services tax from January till June this year.

Kuala Krai MP Dr Mohd Hatta Ramli said the government should not use the excuse of a

decline in value of the ringgit in raising the price of petrol.

“People are already burdened by the high costs as a result of the decline in value of our currency, and with the goods and services tax (GST) imposed.

“This is the second increase in petrol prices within two months and this is done when the price of crude oil is on the decline,” he said.

Burdening people going back for Raya

Hatta (photo), who is a former PAS election director, said the rise in petrol prices would burden the people especially with the coming Hari Raya and when they go back to their kampung.

He added that the Kelantan folks would be deeply affected by the hike, as they have lost the train service due to the floods last year.

“The train is an important mode of transportation in Kelantan and now that it is not functioning, the people will have to use the roads.

“I have brought this matter up in Parliament, by saying Keretapi Tanah Melayu should be allowed to operate up to Dabong where other public transport like buses should be allowed to operate to transport passengers to the Kelantan towns.

“There is only one bridge affected by the flood and it is the Kemubu bridge, and it should not take two years for it to be repaired,” Hatta said.

For this reason, he said the government under Najib lacked wisdom in looking after the welfare of the people who will now be burdened further by the petrol hike.

Sungai Siput MP Dr D Jeyakumar (photo) from Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM) said while he supported the increase in petrol prices in a bid to lessen the use of private transport, and reduce road congestion, he pointed out that the timing is not appropriate.

“If we have a good and efficient transport system, it would be alright. But the transport system in the country is not good.

“It maybe good in the urban and city areas, but the public transport in rural areas like in Sungai Siput is not much to be desired.

“I don't mind if the hike in petrol prices means lowering the subsidies, and the funds are used to improve public transport all over the country. However, the savings are not being used as such,” he warned.

Hence, Jeyakumar said the timing in raising the petrol price is wrong.

Both Hatta and Jeyakumar were met at the Petaling Jaya court where 79 people are charged

with illegal assembly during an anti-GST protest at the Customs headquarters in Kelana Jaya.

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