

'Reduce prices or face protests'

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If its demands are not met, the movement against price hikes - or Protes - is prepared to organise a massive rally against the rise in price of petrol, diesel, sugar and liquified petroleum gas due to subsidy cuts.

The movement said it wants the government to:

- * Stop wastage in development - for example, on the PKFZ and other white elephant projects such as the new palace
- * Enforce a minimum wage policy
- * Revert to the original price of petrol, diesel, sugar and liquified petroleum gas before the price went up this month
- * Explain how the RM4.6 billion 'saved' from a pervious fuel subsidy cut in 2006 has been spent
- * Restructure subsidies so that the poor will still be subsidised

NONE However, holding a rally will be the action of last resort, Protes coordinator and PAS treasurer Mohd Hatta Ramli told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur today.

In the interim, a campaign dubbed Bantah: Selamatkan Rakyat (Protest: Save the People) will be launched to run various programmes to ensure that the message reaches the people.

The launch will be held on Aug 9 at Kampung Kerinchi "because the area has lower- to middle-income (residents) and these are the people who are the most affected by the price hike".

NONE "We will rent a bus to distribute pamphlets and books to people all around Malaysia. There will also be speeches given at night.

"We will also hand over a protest memorandum to the prime minister on Oct 14 at Parliament House," said Mohd Hatta.

"We will wait until the last day of the Parliament session (in December) and if there is no announcement from the government, then we will organise a demonstration."

'No logic' behind decision

Small-scale protests will be held nationwide, according to PSM secretary-general S Arutchelvan, who was present.

NONE Lembah Pantai MP Nurul Izzah (right) said Protes will go through all possible channels before resorting to a demonstration.

"We will give the government a chance to explain (first)," she said.

On the government's rationale that subsidy cuts will help reduce the budget deficit, Jeringan

Rakyat Tertindas representative Y Kohila questioned the sincerity of the move.

"85 percent of Malaysians earn less than RM3,000 (a month). Companies are earning millions (of ringgit). Why is the government still subsidising these companies? Has the government forgotten about these big fish?" she asked.

Jamaah Islah Malaysia secretary-general Nahar Md Nor said the subsidy cuts indicate that the government does not have a plan to save the economy.

"They even want to save a meagre five sen (by taking it) from the people. What kind of plan is this?" he asked.

protes demo 260108Protes consists of 21 NGOs, political parties and two individuals - cartoonist Zulkiflee Anwar Ulhaque, who is better known as Zunar, and social activist and former ISA detainee Hishamuddin Rais.

Suaram, Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia, Kumpulan Mahasiswa Independent, Budayawan Bertindak and Gabungan Mahasiswa Islam Se-Malaysia sent representatives to the press conference.

The movement had previously held rallies in Kuala Lumpur.

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