

Shahrir's motion: 129 yes, 78 no
Malaysiakini.com
Jun 23, 2008
Fauwaz Abdul Aziz & Rahmah Ghazali

The government today won a crucial vote in Parliament supporting its fuel price hike, which the opposition had hoped to turn it into a no-confidence vote against Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.
MCPX

shahrir samad and price goods inflation Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Shahrir Abdul Samad kicked off the debate by tabling the motion this morning seeking support for, among others, the slashing of oil subsidies.

Coming on the heels of the 40 percent oil hike announced on June 4, the motion was hotly debated by members of parliament on both sides of the House before it went for a vote.

There are no surprises when it was put to vote at 7.10pm after six hours of debate - no BN parliamentarians voted against the government.

The final result: 129 in favour, 78 against. The motion was passed.

BN has a total of 140 members - including two Dewan Rakyat deputy speakers - in the House, of which eleven were absent today from voting while the Pakatan Rakyat has a total of 82 MPs.

Among the BN absentees were the two MPs from Sabah Progressive Party (Sapp), a coalition member that dropped a bombshell last week when it called for the no-confidence vote. They were absent from Parliament after saying they had received threats.

Met at the lobby later, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz said that the success of the motion indicated that BN backbenchers remained united.

"The opposition wanted to turn this into a motion of no-confidence against the prime minister but BN stayed united. There is no question of BN MPs wanting to jump to the other side," he told reporters.

The 11 BN absentees

PKR vice president and Gombak MP Azmin Ali however claimed that it was a "major success" for the opposition alliance.

percentage of seats in parliament 300408"(BN) 'lost' 11 votes. I know because some of them contacted me and said they will not be physically present as they don't want to be part of the motion," claimed Azmin.

Of the 11 BN MPs who were not present, three were Sabahan MPs - Chua Soon Bui (Sapp-Tawau) and Eric Enchin Majimbun (Sapp-Sepanggar), as well as Raime Unggi (Umno-Tenom).

Two Sarawakian MPs - James Dawos Mamit (PBB-Mambong) and Tiong Thai King

(Supp-Lanang) were also absent.

The remaining were ministers Zulhasnan Rafique (Umno-Setiawangsa), Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (Umno-Bagan Datoh) and Dr Rais Yatim (Umno-Jelebu), ex-ministers Rafidah Aziz (Umno-Kuala Kangsar) and Radzi Sheikh Ahmad (Umno-Kangar), and ex-deputy minister Tengku Azlan Abu Bakar (Umno-Jerantut),

On the Pakatan's front, those who could not make it in time for the voting were Nurul Izzah Anwar (PKR-Lembah Pantai), Gobind Singh Deo (DAP-Puchong) and Chow Kon Yeow (DAP-Tanjong). The fourth Pakatan MP who was not present could not be ascertained immediately.

Shahrir moved the motion

Earlier in the day, the government's motion moved by Shahrir was the first order of business on the first day of the second parliamentary sitting after a three-week break.

The motion stated that the price increases were part of "a global phenomenon outside the control of the government" and cannot be delayed due to the continuously rising prices globally of oil.

The restructuring of oil and gas subsidies was aimed at lessening their impact on the national economy, relieving the burden on the government's financial position, and allocating subsidies more fairly to those in need, said Shahrir.

"For example, pumped petrol and diesel subsidies are expected to increase from RM8.8 billion in 2007 to RM27 billion in 2008. This is a heavy burden that the government can no longer bear," said Shahrir in his speech.

He also noted that while Petronas' contributions to the government was 35 percent of the government's budget for 2007, its subsidies to the energy and non-energy sectors came up to RM15.6 billion.

Despite the increasing challenges at the global environment, the government has resolved to take steps to increase economic growth and "advance the national development agenda", he added.

Reject demonstrations, protests

Despite knowing the move to increase oil and diesel prices will be an unpopular move, the government has acted responsibly by not passing that responsibility to future generations, he added.

Shahrir then reiterated some of the steps taken by the government to alleviate the problems arising from dearer oil and diesel prices - cash rebates for those with low-capacity cars and motorcycles, the maintenance of diesel prices for public transport operators with 'fleetcards' as well as electricity tariffs for households consuming less than RM43.60 worth of electricity per month.

shahrir samad pc 020508 shahrir samadShahrir also said that while businesses should not worsen the situation by arbitrarily raising the prices of their goods or services to the

detriment of the people, the people should reject demonstrations and public protests over the crisis of inflation.

"Demonstrations and protests will not benefit anybody, but will only erode confidence if economic activities and foreign investments are hindered as a result of the ensuing instability."

Aware of the need to prepare in the event of a future economic recession, the government was also taking steps towards prudent spending and "calls on all quarters and the public at large to take the same steps", said Shahrir.

Giving APs to everyone

Supporting the motion, Razali Ibrahim (BN-Muar) commended the government for re-structuring its subsidies to ensure it efficiently and effectively reached the poor and others who qualified as opposed to high-income earners and foreigners.

He however suggested some changes in policies, such as in the issuance of Approved Permits (APs) as to benefit the people in general instead of private individuals.

He proposed that the APs are issued to governmental agencies as the Commercial Vehicle Licensing Board (CVLB), the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) and governmental investment firm Permodalan Nasional Bhd to be redistributed equally.

Opposing the motion, Lim Guan Eng (DAP-Bagan) said the government had resulted in Malaysia gaining the dubious reputation of having increased fuel prices by more than any other government.

Lim also questioned the government's seriousness in cutting costs when national petroleum firm Petronas continued to give as much as RM10 billion in subsidies to independent power producers (IPP).

"The government has guaranteed billions of ringgit in profit to IPPs while the people continue to suffer," said Lim.

He also said Petronas' profits of more than RM80 billion was more than enough to channel as much as RM6,000 for every household in Malaysia to ease their burdens as a result of the price hike.

Khairy riles up Pakatan MPs

In his speech debating the motion, Khairy Jamaluddin (BN-Rembau) took the opportunity not only to shoot down the points raised by Pakatan Rakyat MPs but to take jabs at component party PKR's de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim.

Azmin Ali (PKR-Gombak) had earlier cited the allegation that the government had used Petronas' profits to save Bumiputera Bank.

Petronas had also been made to bail out shipping company Konsortium Perkapalan Bhd (KPB), in which former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad's son Mirzan had a majority stake, Azmin claimed.

khairy jamaluddin parliament pc 230608 01Khairy, however, turned the tables on PKR by noting that Anwar was the finance minister during the KPB bailout.

"Don't you know he was also part of the government back then? Of course, he knew where the money went," said Khairy.

"When he got sacked, (only) now he's speaking up. What a hypocrite!" added Khairy, resulting in several minutes of pandemonium in the House.

Describing Pakatan MPs' proposals in relation to Petronas as "simplistic and childish", he did not let up but upped the ante in levelling his attacks on Anwar.

Accusing him of being a "puppet" for the International Monetary Fund (IMF), he concluded by saying that Pakatan should ask the latter for help.

"(Perhaps) they should ask for International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s help as they are "international loan shark and Anwar is a puppet for them," said Khairy,

It led to several minutes of pandemonium as Pakatan MPs stood up in protest and loudly, but vainly, demanded a retraction.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/84874>