

Mass protest against GST when Parliament resumes
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A coalition of rights groups and opposition parties are rallying "thousands" to protest the impending Goods and Services Tax (GST) implementation when the Dewan Rakyat convenes on March 15.

The group, who refers to themselves as Protes, hopes to draw the attention of Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Mizan Zainal Abidin, who is expected to arrive at Parliament at 9am.

The much criticised Goods and Services Tax Bill will be tabled for second reading during the upcoming sitting of the Dewan Rakyat.

According to coordinator Dr Hatta Ramli, the group are protesting against the implementation of GST as it will burden the poor.

"We want the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to understand and see that the rakyat is against the GST," he explained in a press conference at the PAS headquarters today.

The protest, he said will be conducted peacefully and would not disrupt traffic.

"We expect it to be the most peaceful protest in Malaysian history because we do not want to interrupt Parliament's sitting," he continued.

Therefore, the Kuala Krai parliamentarian explained that the group will not be applying for a permit.

"According to a survey done by an independent body, it shows that the majority of Malaysians has rejected the GST," he said.

He said that based on research conducted by consultants for the government, the cost of education, recreational activities, healthcare, foodstuff, and eating out will increase.

He also unveiled their new tagline for the protest - '*Cukai yang memiskinkan rakyat, Gagalkan sebelum terlambat*' - which means 'GST causes poverty, stop it before too late'.

Not the best system

Hatta claimed that GST is not the best system available and does not understand the government's rationale in selecting it.

He said that the Finance Ministry claimed that GST will increase the country's income to up to RM1 billion.

"But if we were to sell Approved Permits through open tenders, the government can make RM2.4 billion. " he said.

Also present was Parti Socialist Malaysia (PSM) secretary-general S Arutchelvan who claimed that many non-governmental organisations and consumers groups were also against the GST.

"Before, only the rich are taxed but with GST everyone would be taxed even the poor, disabled and the elderly," he said calling GST the real 1Malaysia tax.

PKR strategy director Tian Chua (*left*) who is also one of the coordinators for the protest said even the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers have rejected GST for fear of a massive inflation triggered by this new tax.

"It was proven that countries that implement GST will go through a sudden surge of inflation," he said, adding that this tax is not practical.

Reform a source of income

He further said reform of the government sectors can be a source of income rather than implementing GST which will only transfer the cost to the people.

"We could save money by reducing corruption and mega projects but the government needs the political will to transform."

The protest is a joint effort of Jaringan Rakyat Tertindas, PAS, Suaram, PSM, DAP, PKR and GMI and are they are encouraging interested parties to join the protest.

Dr Hatta told reporters that they are hoping that former Selangor Menteri Besar Dr Mohamad Khir Toyo would be present as well.

"We heard that he is unhappy with this GST as well, so he is welcome to join us," he said with a laugh.

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