

PM bound to lose GST referendum
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Despite growing calls for a referendum on the Goods and Services Tax (GST) bill by academicians, one has refuted the idea because it could cause 'too much politicking'.

In a quick opinion survey conducted by Malaysiakini, UKM associate professor Mohammad Agus Yusoff said that the idea of a referendum would only confuse the people further.

He said GST is relatively a small matter to be on a referendum.

"For example, Canada opted for a referendum to decide whether the province of Quebec should secede from Canada and become an independent state in 1995. Referendums should be used to discuss bigger problems like that and not for GST," he added

However, he said the contentious tax can be implemented only if the country can boast of a high-income society.

"This is not a right time to implement GST," he added.

Minister in the Prime Minister Department Nazri Abdul Aziz shot down calls for a referendum on the controversial GST bill yesterday as it would open the floodgates for referendums on other matters.

Government is fearful

NONE Petaling Jaya Utara parliamentarian Tony Pua (left) said the government fears that the GST bill will be overwhelmingly defeated if a referendum takes place.

"Knowing this, the government is just making an excuse by saying that a referendum is not necessary for petty matters like the GST," he added.

Pua said, "The implementation of the tax would touch the livelihood of all people, poor and rich alike. So we should have a referendum and people should be informed of its implications."

Centre for Policy Initiatives director Lim Teck Ghee said, "The minister (Nazri Abdul Aziz) seems to have no confidence in the government's ability to argue its case. Perhaps, he feels the government's stance is weak"

He also said that a public referendum is necessary as the government cannot rely on the official mass media to relay honest feedback from the public.

"A referendum is an important mechanism for determining public opinion on certain issues other than elections. It also helps to strengthen democracy," he added.

He said the government's flip-flopping on the issue puts it in a bad light and could drive away foreign investors.

"They must be wondering when the next flip-flop would take place - perhaps in the New

Economic Model," he added.

Professor Aruna Gopinath from National Defence University and PSM chairperson Nasir Hashim concurred that a public referendum is essential as it would help people from all walks of life understand in depth the GST and its implications.

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