



WE'VE GOT A PLAN: Abdullah and Najib (behind him) greeting BN leaders.

Drive to prevent profiteers from succeeding

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — A mammoth drive is under way to prevent traders from arbitrarily jacking up the prices of goods and services.

Barisan Nasional is mobilising its 4.5 million members to monitor the situation nationwide and to explain the rationale for the Government's move to increase fuel prices by 30 sen per litre.

Cases of profiteering will be immediately referred to the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs offices for action.

Prime Minister and BN chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced the initiative today after he reiterated his concern over unjustified price hikes.

"I don't understand why prices of goods increase. For instance, we control the prices of sugar and milk, so the price of *teh tarik* should not be greatly affected.

"I also learned that some car park operators were increasing their charges.

"For what? What is the rationale for doing this?" he told about 4,000 BN leaders who attended a briefing on the matter at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Abdullah took to the rostrum about 10.15am and addressed the Government's decision to raise fuel prices.

When he finished, more than 15 people from the floor stood up to ask questions on several related matters such as the upgrading of public transport nationwide, protection of farmers' livelihoods and concern that the Opposition would capitalise on this issue for political mileage.

Abdullah gamely tackled all the questions.

He said traders should not capitalise on the fuel price increase, and members tasked with monitoring the prices of goods and services could channel their information on any variances to the relevant authorities, such as the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry.

He said BN component parties, through their consumer bureaus, must also play an advisory role in the matter in addition to being watchdogs.

"I know not all divisions have consumer units. Thus, those which have yet to set up such a unit must do so fast," he added.

Abdullah then urged consumers to do more to prevent prices of goods and services from spiralling out of control.

The Prime Minister said the lack of explanation on the Government's move to raise petrol prices had caused some people to misunderstand the rationale for it, and that had given the Opposition the opportunity to criticise the Govern-

ment.

"The Opposition can come and see us to learn why it was necessary to impose the 30 sen increase.

"We have nothing to hide. We have to be transparent. Otherwise, it will only make things difficult for us."

He added that the fuel price increase had been misconstrued by certain quarters who assumed the Government had totally stopped subsidising the commodity.

"This is so wrong. We are still giving subsidies, and because of higher prices of crude oil globally we have to make adjustments."

Asked whether today's briefing was to assuage the people's anger and confusion, Abdullah said the objective of the briefing was to explain to the component parties and grassroots leaders why the decision, though unpopular, was necessary.

On whether the Government should let operators set the prices of fuel so that it would not bear the full brunt of the people's anger when prices increased, Abdullah said such a move was unlikely.

"The operators' prices are higher than what consumers are paying now and which we have to subsidise. If we do this, then the people will ask us to intervene.

"We don't want to burden the people," he said.