

NEW STRAITS TIMES

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# PM's new measures to help public cope

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**PUTRAJAYA:** A series of swift but incisive measures, including a cost-cutting regime by government departments and agencies, will be announced early next week to ease the burden of the people following the sharp increase in fuel prices and electricity tariffs.

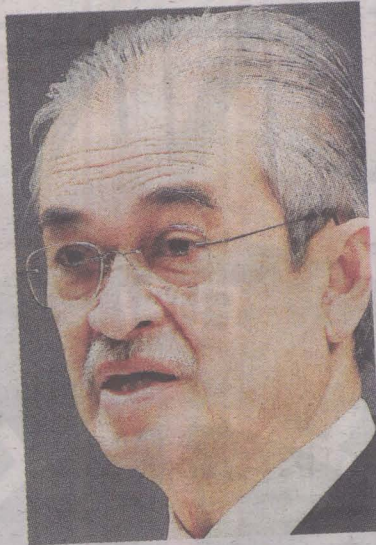
Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the social safety net would also be expanded for those in the lower income bracket and underprivileged groups, like single mothers and the handicapped, to enable more people to be eligible for benefits from welfare services.

Also on the cards are plans to enlarge the list of controlled items and to increase the number of public transport vehicles, like buses, he told editors at his office yesterday.

Abdullah said government officials entrusted with working out the details would be working over the weekend so that they could be announced early next week, most likely on Monday.

He said the government was mindful of the burden on the people as a result of the increase in fuel prices and electricity tariffs.

He said raising fuel prices and electricity tariffs was not some-



**Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi says government spending on official events will also be looked into**

thing that the government liked to do.

However, it had to bite the bullet now to prepare for the long-term benefit of the nation and its future generation.

Abdullah said the government's

scheme of providing free food and uniforms to needy schoolchildren would also be fine-tuned to ensure that more children would benefit, and that the increase in fuel prices did not affect schooling.

The prime minister said government spending on official ceremonies and conferences would also be looked into.

He added that the cost-cutting effort would see a more prudent selection of participants in these events.

The government's cost-cutting measures would include reducing overseas travel and the number of officials involved.

"The cost saved in these areas could be spent on other things."

Abdullah said the government had recognised the likelihood of increase in food prices following the increase in fuel prices and electricity tariffs, so the number of essential items on the price control list would be expanded to keep costs down.

He also announced the establishment of a National Inflation Council, comprising members from both the government and private sectors. It would hold its first meeting on Monday.