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'Fuel price hike too drastic'

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KUALA LUMPUR: The people yesterday generally moaned the government's move to raise fuel prices and called for the decision to be reviewed as they felt that the hike was too high and burdensome.

Some lambasted the move and even staged demonstrations to vent their dissatisfaction.

Umno Youth executive council member Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir, who called on the government to reconsider the move, said the people were not yet able to deal with the problem at a time when the cost of living was on the rise.

He said the hike should have been done in stages and announced well in advance so that people would not be very much burdened.

"The decision to raise fuel prices effective today (Wednesday) was too drastic and unacceptable to the public. Furthermore, the increase was too high," Mukhriz said when contacted by Bernama.

Mukhriz, who is Jerlun MP, said the implications were not only felt by rural folk but also by urban residents who would be faced with rising food prices, transport cost and other costs.

"I'm quite taken aback by the prime minister's statement in which he asked the people to adjust their lifestyle to the current situation. If you look in the interior areas like Jerlun, many people are living from hand-to-mouth. How

are they to adjust to the fuel price hike?" he asked.

Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) adviser Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim also spoke against the measure which he felt was burdening the people. He said with the increase in the fuel prices, electricity tariffs would similarly go up and this would aggravate the situation.

Ipoh Timur MP Lim Kit Siang said the annual cash rebate would not be able to fully cushion the low and middle income Malaysians from inflationary spiral.

He said equally of concern would be the deterioration of public safety index with expected worsening of the crime situation.

"The prime minister and all the cabinet ministers owe Malaysians a full and acceptable explanation why they could not fully involve the Malaysian public in the structuring of the fuel pricing system," Lim added.

In LANGKAWI, tourism and public transport operators are lamenting the hike and see it as burdensome and may adversely affect the duty-free island's tourism industry. Kedah Tourism and Exploration Agencies Association chairman Pishol Ishak appealed to operators to maintain their rates to ensure tourists would continue to visit the island.

Langkawi Taxi Operators Association chairman Othman Hussein said the fuel price rise would affect taxi drivers' income

and hoped that the government would consider a special incentive for them. He said the association, whose members had 600 taxis, would have a special meeting today (Friday) to discuss new taxi fares on the island.

In Cameron Highlands, vegetable farmers asked the Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Ministry to raise the incentive given to them to offset the fuel price increase.

Cameron Highlands Vegetable Farmers Association secretary Chay Ee Mong said the RM81 per tonne incentive was inadequate.

He hoped the incentive could be increased quickly to lighten the cost of transporting agricultural produce to Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Ipoh.

The fuel price hike would also affect vegetable farming due to the higher cost of using farming machinery and generators, he said, adding that even before the hike, farmers had long lamented the rising cost of farming items.

Vegetable farmers in Cameron Highlands work on 1,600ha and involve more than 2,000 workers.

In KOTA KINABALU, Sabah Progressive Party President Datuk Yong Teck Lee said the fuel price increase would likely result in a serious political fallout for the Barisan Nasional government.

"If there is a by-election as a result of election petitions (filed in court), this increase of fuel prices will be a major issue," he said.

He said in a democratic system,

The decision to raise fuel prices effective was too drastic and unacceptable to the public. Furthermore, the increase was too high."

- Mukhriz

Average petrol expenditure (RM) under new subsidy scheme (at RM2.70) a litre

Monthly average usage in the past	100	150	200	250	300	350	400	500
New average monthly usage	140.62	210.95	281.26	351.57	421.88	492.18	562.49	703.13
Difference per month	40.62	60.95	81.26	101.57	121.88	142.18	162.49	203.13
Real difference per month (taking into account monthly rebate of RM52.08)	-11.46	8.87	29.18	49.49	69.80	90.10	110.41	151.05
Real difference per year (taking into account annual rebate of RM625)	-131.56	106.40	350.12	593.84	837.56	1,081.16	1,324.88	1,812.56

the government was elected by the people and if the people were not happy, they would stop supporting the government in many ways, and not just through the ballot box.

"When the people are having financial difficulties and economic problems, obviously they will voice their grouses which will put pressure on political parties or elected representatives and also on government officers. And if we begin to lose the goodwill of the people, it becomes more difficult to govern." - Bernama