

Upset Malaysians dismiss Putrajaya cash handout, believe fuel price hike precursor to more bad news

Malaysian Insider

Sept 3 , 2013

BY THE MALAYSIAN INSIDER TEAM

Thousands of outraged Malaysians queued up for fuel last night ahead of a price hike, venting their anger at Putrajaya for cutting subsidies while promising more cash handouts to offset a 20-sen rise in pump prices.

Most of them when met in petrol stations in the Klang Valley pointed out they are not eligible for Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia (BR1M) cash handouts which the Najib government had promised to increase in Budget 2014.

That special handout of RM500 was paid to some five million households earning RM3,000 a month and below

They also felt that the pump price rise was sudden and suspect more bad news in the form of the controversial goods and services tax (GST) will soon follow. The tax has been on the drawing board for the past decade but has yet to be law.

Before Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced the fuel price hike that would save the government RM3.3 billion annually, RON95 was sold at RM1.90 per litre while diesel was RM1.80 per litre. After midnight it was RM2.10 and RM2.00 respectively.

A businessman who wanted to be known only as YK said the price hike will definitely burden those from the lower-income group.

BR1M, he said, will not make a difference as not everyone is eligible for the special handout.

"It does not make a difference to me because I am not eligible for it. The cost of living will still go up for me," the 45-year-old told The Malaysian Insider.

YK, along with insurance agent Nor, 34, were among those who queued up for at least 45 minutes at the Bandar Puteri petrol station in Puchong last night following the prime minister's announcement.

Nor, who is also not eligible for BR1M, said the hike would really hit those who had families.

"Everyone knows the cost of living will go up when the price of petrol increases. It came as quite a shock to me (the announcement)," said the mother-of-two.

"It is not fair. Not everyone gets the BR1M. Although it won't make a significant change, it is still something."

YK agreed, noting that from today onwards, everything, from food to household items, would cost at least 20 sen more.

However, he was confident that the hike was only temporary as this was because the price of oil had gone up worldwide recently.

"Although this move by the government is bad, it is understandable.

"But as soon as the price of oil comes down globally, we hope to see a similar drop in price here," he added.

Amir Azri, 26, said this move by the government was "extremely bad".

"First there was no warning, then a 20 sen hike. If it was 10-sen hike, I could live with it. This is so troubling," he said at the Petronas petrol station in Pandan Indah in the capital city Kuala Lumpur last night.

Amir was not convinced of the BR1M handout saying it will be a one-off thing.

"We have to live with the new petrol price everyday," he said.

Insurance broker Nur Adawiah, 23, however said she did not feel the pinch, yet.

"Although the hike came suddenly, I am still okay with it. I can afford it.

"But the government cannot say they are compensating us with BR1M because not everyone is eligible," she said.

Workshop owner, Wong Sooi Ying complained that the hike was too sudden.

And what about BR1M?

"It's all just talk, no walk," said the 53-year-old woman.

"You wait and see, next it will be GST, although that will take some time."

Manager, Shanger, 40, told The Malaysian Insider at the Shell petrol station in Pandan Indah last night that the price hike is all wrong.

"Now the other businesses will take advantage and increase the prices of their goods and services.

"This is definitely a burden to everyone," he said.

At the Shell petrol station in Batu 14, Jalan Puchong, irate housewife Shamsidar Dahlan said the fuel cost rise would trigger a chain reaction which will lead to an increase in food prices.

"There are people always waiting to take the opportunity to profit once the price of fuel goes up," she said.

Shamsidar said the average income earner would suffer whatever was the government's rationale to raise the price of fuel.

"Do we have a choice to stop the price from going up after midnight?" she asked.

Clerk Anisah Shariff said she was caught by surprise by the announcement and questioned why the government needed to increase fuel prices just after the general election.

"I suppose the government wants to collect money from urban voters to pay the BR1M

recipients.

She said having a car was a necessity in the Klang Valley because public transportation was unreliable.

Electrician Lau Yong Kwai said car owners today had no choice but to accept the hike.

"I was taken aback when my friends told me that price of petrol will be up by 20 sen after midnight," said Lau.

He also wondered if there will be more announcements in the weeks to come by the government to fill its coffers.

"Well, they got nothing to worry about now because the elections are over," he said, adding that he hoped the government would look into measures like cutting on wastage and checking on leakages in the economy. - September 3, 2013.

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