

## **'Allowances cut to encourage prudent spending'**

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KUALA LUMPUR: The main reason the government slashed civil servants' allowances was to encourage the public to spend prudently, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Shahidan Kassim said today.

But the minister told the Dewan Rakyat this morning that public servants would not suffer from the reduced allowances, as their salary will remain untouched.

"The main reason we reduced incentives is to encourage the rakyat to spend prudently. But there is no (adverse) impact on them because it just involves cutting entertainment allowances and the switching (their flights) from business to economy class," Shahidan said during question session this morning.

He was responding to a question from Abdullah Sani Abdul Hamid (PKR-Kuala Langat), who asked whether the government would reconsider reducing salaries and allowances of civil servants given the rise in cost of living and essential goods.

An irate Abdullah Sani pointed out that Shahidan's answer flies in the face of government ministers' own excessive spending, and took a dig at Rosmah Mansor's private jet trip to Qatar, which cost taxpayers RM426,489.

The PKR lawmaker said that while the country's leaders and their wives enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle at the expense of taxpayers, public servants' salaries and allowances had remained stagnant throughout the years.

"What measures will the government take to ensure public servants are not left in the lurch, especially in view of the goods and services tax (GST) soon to be implemented?" demanded Abdullah Sani.

But Shahidan sidestepped the question, saying that his queries would be answered when the GST Bill is tabled for the second reading in Parliament tomorrow.

"We are not reducing their salaries. We are just cutting a small amount of their entertainment allowance and this only applies to ministers, deputy ministers, and grade Jusa C officers," said Shahidan.

In December last year, Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak announced 11 measures to slash public sector expenditure which included reducing senior government officers' allowances by 5% to 10%.

The toll facilities would also be reduced by 30%, or between RM50 to RM100. Meanwhile, grade Jusa C officers and below would only be eligible for economy class flights.

The austerity measures announced came in the wake of rising public concern over the increased

cost of living.

While civil societies lauded the move, many pointed out the government needed to do more to convince the people that it was reducing expenditure for the people's benefit.

However, the government is now seeking an additional RM2.392 billion for its annual expenditure, and the Supplementary Supply Bill, which is being tabled for its second reading is expected to be passed later this evening.

The Prime Minister's Department and Public Service Department are the agencies seeking the highest additional allocations of RM55.6 million and RM53.3 million respectively.

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