

Hearing And Speech-Impaired Community Still In The Dark Over GST

Bernama

Oct 15, 2014

News Focus By S. Kisho Kumari

KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama) -- While most Malaysians are having animated discussions over the Goods and Services Tax (GST), Sariah Ibrahim only had a vague idea of what it was all about.

It was only after attending a self-empowerment course organised by the Seputih Umno branch recently that the hearing- and speech-impaired Sariah was able to get a better picture of the tax, which is set for implementation next April.

While many briefings and programmes have been conducted to explain to the people details of the GST, the disabled community, however, is lamenting over the lack of information being made available to them.

Practically the entire supply chain, from manufacturers, distributors, retailers to end-consumers, has been educated about the workings of the GST as well as how it will benefit the nation and the people.

ONUS IS ON GOVERNMENT

Now the onus is on the government to disseminate GST-related information to people like Sariah so that they are also kept in the loop as to how the tax will affect them after it is implemented.

The hearing- and speech-impaired community, for instance, is still in the dark as to what the tax is all about.

Sariah, 45, who is President of the Negeri Sembilan Society for the Deaf, said many members of the community are still unaware of the GST.

"I've been asking around and most of them don't even know what the GST is all about. They also don't know how to go about getting more information on the tax," she told Bernama in an interview recently.

Sariah responded to the questions posed to her through sign language, which was interpreted by Azlina Mohamed Isa, a sign language interpreter.

NO SPECIAL BRIEFING

Sariah said many of them vaguely understood the benefits that could accrue from the implementation of GST and, in fact, thought the tax would have a negative impact on their household incomes.

"Where are we supposed to get the information from? We can't listen to the radio...we can read the newspapers but then our vocabulary is too limited," she said.

She acknowledged that many briefings and forums are being conducted to explain the workings of the GST but, unfortunately, they are not tailored to meet the requirements of the hearing- and speech-impaired community.

So far there has been no special briefing on the GST for people with hearing and speech impairment, said Sariah, who is a sign language programme consultant as well as a motivator for the hearing- and speech-impaired community.

WHY THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND

"We can't attend the briefings meant for normal people. We don't understand the language used by normal people. For us, the language used has to be very precise and simple to understand...to tell you the truth, we are more comfortable with the standard of language meant for children," she said.

Commenting on the community's language skills, Azlina pointed out that explanations have to be summarised and simplified as much as possible as they do not understand sophisticated terminology.

"Take for example words like 'transformasi' (transformation) and 'natijah' (outcome). If we try to communicate with them using such words, they won't understand. They will only understand if we use simple words like, for instance, 'perubahan' instead of 'transformasi'.

"This is because their vocabulary is too limited. Hence, if there are two different words which have the same meaning, I will use the same sign to describe both words," said Azlina, who has been working as a sign language interpreter since 1988.

OPPOSITION TAKING ADVANTAGE

Opposition political parties are, meanwhile, said to be taking advantage of the lack of dissemination of information on the GST to the disabled community by feeding them with false news and giving them a negative impression of the tax and the government.

"Some of them (from the opposition) have been giving us negative information, and being a minority group, it's easy to fool us," explained Sariah.

She said she and her friends initially did not give much attention to the GST due to the lack of exposure. Only after attending a self-empowerment course organised by the Seputeh Umno branch recently did she realise the importance of the GST.

Sariah said the most effective way to educate them on the GST would be through the use of sign language and simplified language.

"We need special explanation and a sign language interpreter who can relay the information to us accurately," she said.

She is hoping that government agencies and non-governmental organisations would come forward to explain the GST clearly to the disabled community in order to dispel any confusion over the issue and keep the detractors at bay.

-- BERNAMA

Copyright © 2014 BERNAMA

Source :<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v7/newsindex.php?id=1076731>