

Enough with the comics, give full list of GST-free items, says Rafidah
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By Anisah Shukry

Putrajaya must change its current approach of educating the public on the goods and services tax (GST) by publishing immediately a list of tax-exempted items in every newspaper in the country, former minister Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz said.

The outspoken former international trade and industry minister said a clear list would help consumers to be better prepared for the new tax which takes effect tomorrow.

She said Putrajaya's reliance on the use of cartoons, billboards and technical jargon such as "zero-rated" for the past year to explain GST has left Malaysian consumers, including herself, more confused over the new tax system.

"I personally think that right now, we should have a complete list of the categories that are exempted, so the public will know which (items) won't be taxed.

"It should be made available in all the newspapers, in all languages, and it should not be technical," Rafidah told The Malaysian Insider.

"Our problem is that the explanation so far has not been clear. The government has been using different sources or different approaches, and most of them have been very technical.

"For instance, who understands what 'zero-rated' means? Why can't they just use the phrase 'tak kena GST' or 'no GST'. That's much simpler and easier to remember."

She said it was also important that Putrajaya first cleared the air over which items would not be taxed, so that consumers would not rush to stores and hoard goods unnecessarily in anticipation of the GST.

Rafidah said the newspaper pull-out would also help consumers identify traders who raise prices on items that were not affected by the GST.

"Let's say on April 1, I read the newspaper and I see that soap will not be taxed. Then I go to the supermarket and see they are charging me 6% for it. Thanks to the pull-out, I know they are cheating me and I can report this.

"Forget about the various codes, the technical jargon and whatnot. All that is irrelevant," said Rafidah.

She added that Putrajaya could pay for the newspaper pull-out as the cost involved would be far less than erecting large billboards across the country.

"Some time ago, there was a billboard near my house that said education would be exempted from GST. It even had a cartoon drawing on it. I thought, what does that

mean? Are university fees or tuition fees exempted from GST? What about books or computers or school-related tools?

"Instead of spending money on all those billboards, by this time you could've gotten a complete publication on all the items that are not taxed," said Rafidah.

She added that a separate exercise should be done for traders so that they could calculate how the GST would affect them, and urged the government to hold meetings with associations.

"Right now, there appears to be no coordinated effort. That's the only problem. I have no quarrels with the tax itself. It is a good move to rationalise taxes. But people are not familiar with it; some are taking advantage of it, and that causes confusion and hoarding." she added.

The GST jingle sung by customs officers which was mocked online by Malaysians. – The Malaysian Insider pic, March 31, 2015. The GST jingle sung by customs officers which was mocked online by Malaysians. – The Malaysian Insider pic, March 31, 2015. One of Putrajaya's efforts to educate the public on GST through a music video recently received heavy criticism from Malaysians after went viral on the internet.

The video, purportedly created by the Customs Department, hailed the virtues of implementing GST, but was panned by critics as "sad", "cheesy" and "reminiscent of the 1970s".

In the meantime, to ease the transition period, the Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism Ministry has set up a round-the-clock operations room to monitor prices after the GST kicks off.

Located at Precinct 2 in Putrajaya, the operations room would also take complaints and reports from the public on GST matters. – March 31, 2015.

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