

BR1M not the solution to rising cost of living

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Malaysians will look to the Budget 2016 for greater relief

This Friday the Prime Minister will present Budget 2016, the first budget in the 11th Malaysia Plan (11MP). Budget 2016 has been touted as a People's Budget, and as a fresh graduate from the lower middle-income class, I am one of the many people waiting to see if the budget will offer any kind of relief from the rising cost of living.

Recent increases in the cost of almost all our daily necessities have made a huge dent in most of our pockets. Add to that the fact that we've also been hit by the GST, petrol and toll hikes and the soon-to-come increase in the cost of public transportation, and you could say that when it rains, it pours.

The GST saw us spending more when eating out and shopping for necessities. Before the GST, a visit to a mamak restaurant cost me around RM6. Now it is RM6.60.

I recently had to resort to driving to work. Months of taking our unreliable public transportation left me with no other choice. In the past 3 months, technical glitches caused the LRT I was on to stall at least 5 times. Add to that the never-on-time, always packed 'Komuter' and the unreliable connecting buses and you can see why I had to resort to driving to work. With the recent toll hike, I had to fork out an additional \$80 a month for the privilege.

Only days ago, the Governor of Bank Negara urged the rakyat to make 'a lifestyle switch to weather the cloudy economic climate ahead' — in other words, we are being asked to tighten our belts and cut spending.

This is easier said than done. For most of us, however, cutting expenses does not equal to making ends meet as our salaries have not kept up with increases in the cost of living — the former has moved like a snail while the latter has sped ahead like a rabbit. Those working in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur especially can vouch for this.

Still some of us are willing to try. I could try to cut back. One way would be to stop driving to work but that would mean taking the unreliable public transportation. As you can see, it is a Catch 22 situation.

The government's response thus far has been the BR1M and not surprisingly it is rumoured that Budget 2016 will see an increase of RM100 in BRIM. Is this THE solution for us? BR1M is not a sustainable solution but rather a short-term measure to ease our burden temporarily.

Or perhaps the solution is the attainment of "high-income nation" by 2020. What good will that do if incomes don't keep up with the cost of living?

One of the main objectives of the nation's budget is to improve the quality of life for us, the rakyat. That quality has taken a big hit lately. It remains to be seen if Budget 2016, the People's Budget, will do anything to alleviate people's concerns.

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