

Massive anti-GST rally planned for May 1
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A coalition of 89 NGOs and Pakatan Rakyat are planning a mass street rally on International Labour Day as a referendum against the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

The May 1 Rally Committee said the protest at Dataran Merdeka is aimed at sending the government a "real message" that the people will not be fooled by its million ringgit "cartoon" GST campaign.

"(If) we don't protest this year, next year we will be April Fools," Parti Sosialis Malaysia secretary-general S Arutchelvan told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur today.

"The government has to come up with caricatures and cartoons to campaign for the new tax because no real people will say they like this GST."

The rally - themed 'GST - Protest till it is dropped' - aims to draw the participation of students, who will be among the hardest hit by the tax due to be imposed from April next year.

Activist Gan Yu Lin from the Malaysian Youth and Student Democratic movement said those who earn less than RM3,000 a month now pay no income tax now, but they will have to bear the burden of GST along with those who are unemployed.

The first GST Bill tabled in 2009 had been blocked following a May 1 rally in 2010 that also had an anti-GST theme.

Rally coordinator Parameswari Elumalai said May 1 rallies have been held in Malaysia since 1994, but hoped that this will be the biggest yet in terms of turnout.

Among the NGOs who have pledged support are Solidariti Anak Muda Malaysia, Turun, Kuala Lumpur Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, Oppressed People's Network and Himpunan Hijau.

Other issues to be highlighted include the ongoing demand for a minimum wage of RM1,500, fair and free elections, environmental protection, free education, and the rights of women workers and migrant workers.

Pakatan MPs to raise objections

PKR's Pandan MP Rafizi Ramli and PAS' Kuala Krai MP Hatta Ramli, who were present, said they will object to the contents of the GST Bill, tabled yesterday in Parliament.

They will raise this in debate in the Dewan Rakyat on Thursday, but are not confident that the Bill can be blocked.

Hatta, holding up a copy of Bill, said the government must be joking.

"If you look at the government campaign alone, I have never seen people so happy to be taxed ... if you want to say (the government) is stupid, they are are not. In fact, they are really quite clever (to pull this off)," he said.

He said the GST may be an efficient tax but that it is unfair of the government to tax the masses after failing to come up with a system to eradicate tax evasion among affluent segments of the population.

Rafizi said PKR parliamentarians will go all out to fight the Bill in the Dewan Rakyat and even in the courts.

He said the party also backs street rallies as an alternative democratic route as "BN is only afraid of the people's power".

Asked if the rally will have any impact, the Mps cited the case of the Internal Security Act, which was abolished in 2012 after decades of protest.

They are hopeful that anti-GST protests will work more quickly as people's pockets will be hit.

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