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## 2014 brings some respite for Malaysians

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysians will be entering 2014 with the good news that the government will review the decision to rationalise subsidy so that it can truly ease the burden of the target group.

Therefore, at least for the moment, Malaysians need not worry on the prospect of incurring higher cost of living in 2014 due to the rise in the price of goods and services.

The impending hike on electricity tariff and toll rates and probably fuel in 2014 in the government's efforts to rationalise subsidies has raised concerns of the general public and interest groups who fear it will be too much to bear.

However, Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on the final hours of 2013 assured that the gov-

ernment subsidy would be looked at in a more holistic manner in efforts to reduce the burden of the people, especially the target group.

And just a day earlier Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak announced 11 cost cutting measures for the public sector effective Jan 1 2014,

indicating the government is looking into other options in cutting costs.

### A SPECIAL COMMITTEE NEEDED

Even if there was rise in prices, it was only proper that the government establishes a special committee to monitor the prices so that the people were not overly burdened, said Malaysian Muslim Consumer Association's (PPIM) Chief Activist Datuk Nadzim

Johan.

He pointed out that the rising prices are a major issue to the average consumer and could backfire on the government if not addressed properly.

"Consumers are naturally sensitive to spikes in prices. We can accept when the price of an item goes up but if it is a series of hikes it may not be easy to swallow.

"So don't be surprised if the people lose faith in the government and the government is set to face repercussions when those with vested interest capitalise on the price hike issues," he told Bernama.

### PUBLIC DEEPLY

**CONCERNED**  
According to Nadzim the rise in prices posed a big burden especially for those in the middle and low income

bracket.

"The people find that this is not the right time for price hikes. Prices of sugar and fuel have gone up and we can accept that but how about the increase in cable TV bill, and the bus and LRT fares, it would further burden the people," he added.

Meanwhile, Universiti Utara Malaysia's (UUM) Politics and International Relations analyst Md Shukri Shuib noted that the rationalisation exercise had to be carried out on the necessities and the living cost, and not on the subsidies that might put to test the public's emotional rationality.

### DON'T SAVE, SPEND PRUDENTLY

"The present government is only thinking of saving costs while during Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's administration though the country faced economic crisis, he made sure the government spent instead of

tightening its belts. Because this is how the country could benefit numerous sectors that could pay back to the national economy.

"The government should observe prudent spending instead of tightening the belts. Even if the government is to save it could be done in other areas instead of rationalising the subsidies for the people," he said.

Md Shukri noted that the government had to rationalise with the excesses of the capitalist elite beforehand as this group does not feel the pinch compared with ordinary citizens when the prices go up.

If the government is to make announcement on something like price increase, they have to look into the right time to introduce such measures and should understand the public psychology.

"Looking at the current scenario, the government not only needs religious and economic advisers but also have to appoint psychologists in helping the government run the country and understand the needs and the aspirations of the people," he said. — Bernama