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# Let's talk about hikes

**VOICE OF THE VALLEY**

By PEARL LEE



FROM Arau to Kota Tinggi, everyone's feeling the hike. MPs, assemblymen and even us, the laymen, we are all feeling the pinch.

In the past two weeks, we have been reading, hearing (and will soon be feeling) the impact of escalating costs.

The hubbub started when the Selangor legislative assembly passed a 268 per cent salary hike for speaker Hannah Yeoh (RM22,500). Menteri Besar Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim also received a salary increase (RM29,250 a month) followed by deputy speaker Nik Nazmi Nik Mat (RM15, 750). Assemblymen in the state also received a share of the pie with each now making RM11,250 per month.

The salary hike in Selangor did not go down well with certain quarters with cries on how Yeoh and Khalid's salaries topped Datuk Seri Najib Razak (RM22,826) and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's (RM18,168).

News on escalation of salaries continued as Penang announced it would also increase the salaries and perks of elected representatives to RM11,500. Johor plans to follow suit although the quantum has yet to be decided.

The salaries of our MPs, dubbed as "the lowest paid in the world", are also expected to be reviewed next year after a proposal for a salary hike was shot down last year.

Our MPs presently receive RM6,508.59 month and a RM200 daily meeting allowance while their counterparts in the UK are expected to make £74,000 (RM391,077) annually from 2015.

Let's move on to the hikes that affect mere mortals like you and me.

It was announced last week that the electricity tariff will be increased by 15 per cent in Peninsular Malaysia and 17 per cent in Sabah and Labuan next month.

The silver lining?

Seventy per cent of consumers in the peninsula and 62 per cent in Sabah and Labuan will not be affected as there will not be a tariff increase for consumers who use less than 300kWh a month.

This, according to Energy, Green Technology and Water Minister Datuk Dr Maximus Johnity Ongkili, applies to 4.56 million consumers in the peninsula and 260,000 consumers in Sabah and Labuan.

I rushed home to check my TNB bill, hoping I would be part of this privileged group, only to be left disappointed as my monthly usage averages between 600KWh and 700kWh.

I checked last year's bills when we had been frugal and even then, the usage was between 380 and 450 KWh.

There has also been news of hikes in toll rates.

Works Minister Datuk Fadillah Yusof had in a report recently said the government would decide by this month if it plans to continue or do away with compensation paid to highway operators.

Fadillah said while RM400 million had been allocated

under Budget 2014 to pay the concessionaires, he urged the public to accept changes as the government could gain more than RM400 million in unpaid compensation and the funds could be used for other road projects.

There are 29 tolls in the country and a list of new toll rates have already been circulating on social media sites.

According to the list, my daily toll charges on the Ampang-Kuala Lumpur Elevated Highway will cost RM5 a day instead of RM3.

Public transport conglomerates are also requesting an urgent meeting with the Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) as they feel it is high time for a fare review of rail services which use electricity (namely LRT, Monorail, KTM and ERL) in light of the increase in electricity tariffs.

SPAD CEO Nur Ismail Kamal had in a report said: "We are studying all fare structures in the public transport sector. We will listen. We will study their proposal for a special electricity rate and probably will support it since, after all, the public transport companies are providing service to the masses."

All these come barely weeks after local councils in the Klang Valley, Penang and Perak announced assessment rates and business licence fees would be increased.

And Pakcik Rusli's words ring in my ears.

Rusli, a regular at the mamak restaurant I patronise, had during our teh-tarik session said: "Gula, minyak, elektrik, tol, cukai pintu, LRT semua naik ... gaji kita pula bila nak naik?"

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With a huge sigh, I replied:  
“Entahlah pakcik...”

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