



star2@thestar.com.my

Budget a let-down for the disabled

A RM500 monthly allowance and GST waiver remain an elusive dream.

THE recent Budget 2016 drew mixed reactions from the disabled community. No one, perhaps, was more disappointed than the handicapped who were expecting the Government to give them a monthly allowance of RM500 to help meet the rising cost of living.

For several years now, Malaysians with disabilities have been asking for the relief for all disabled persons in the country. Despite their loud and earnest voices, their pleas have fallen on deaf ears.

The handicapped were also hoping to get a full waiver of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) through their special disabled identification cards, but sadly this was not the case. Wheelchair users

like A.T. who works as an administration assistant would have benefited a lot from such a relief. With her salary of RM900, the extra RM500 each month would have been a godsend. It would have helped to meet her travel expenses to work. A.T. can't access public transport because it isn't wheelchair-friendly. Taxis are the only alternative. The RM500 would nicely cover her taxi fares which amount to RM475 a month.

Life has been tough for S.T. ever since she sustained a spinal cord injury in an accident and ended up in a wheelchair. She earns RM700 a month working from home. She spends about RM200 monthly on medication and medical supplies for her pressure sores.

Another RM300 goes towards the purchase of catheters, urine bags and adult diapers. Taxi fares to the hospital come up to RM80 to RM100 a month. An additional RM500 a month would have been a big help for S.T.

E.T. became paralysed from the neck down following a fall. Now he needs a personal assistant to help with daily living skills. This includes getting up from bed, bathing, dressing, and feeding. An extra RM500 a month would go a long way in helping him to pay part of the cost of engaging a personal assistant.

A mother of a 10-year-old child with cerebral palsy, wrote to me after Budget day. She said: "Handicapped Malaysians are the

biggest minority group in Malaysia, yet they are unfortunately one of the most discriminated and neglected groups in the country. We spent RM4,000 a month on my daughter's school fees, various therapy, health supplements and diapers. We have another non-disabled child to support.

"As a middle income family, our child is not eligible for any allowances or subsidised rehab or adaptive equipment from the Welfare Department, yet we are not rich enough to buy those expensive equipment – with added GST – on our own. My husband is the sole breadwinner in the family. With the GST, petrol and toll hikes, and the increasing prices of goods, we

are struggling to meet our child's special needs," said the young mother, who wanted to remain anonymous.

Another mother who has a walking disability said: "I have been a disabled person for over 50 years; life has not been easy. A RM500 monthly allowance for the disabled would have been most timely in view of the high prices of almost everything. I have a school-going child, too."

On another note, blind activist Yam Tong Woo said it is high time the Government appointed a "Minister for Disabled People". This will be a positive step in ensuring that the needs of Malaysians with disabilities are looked into.