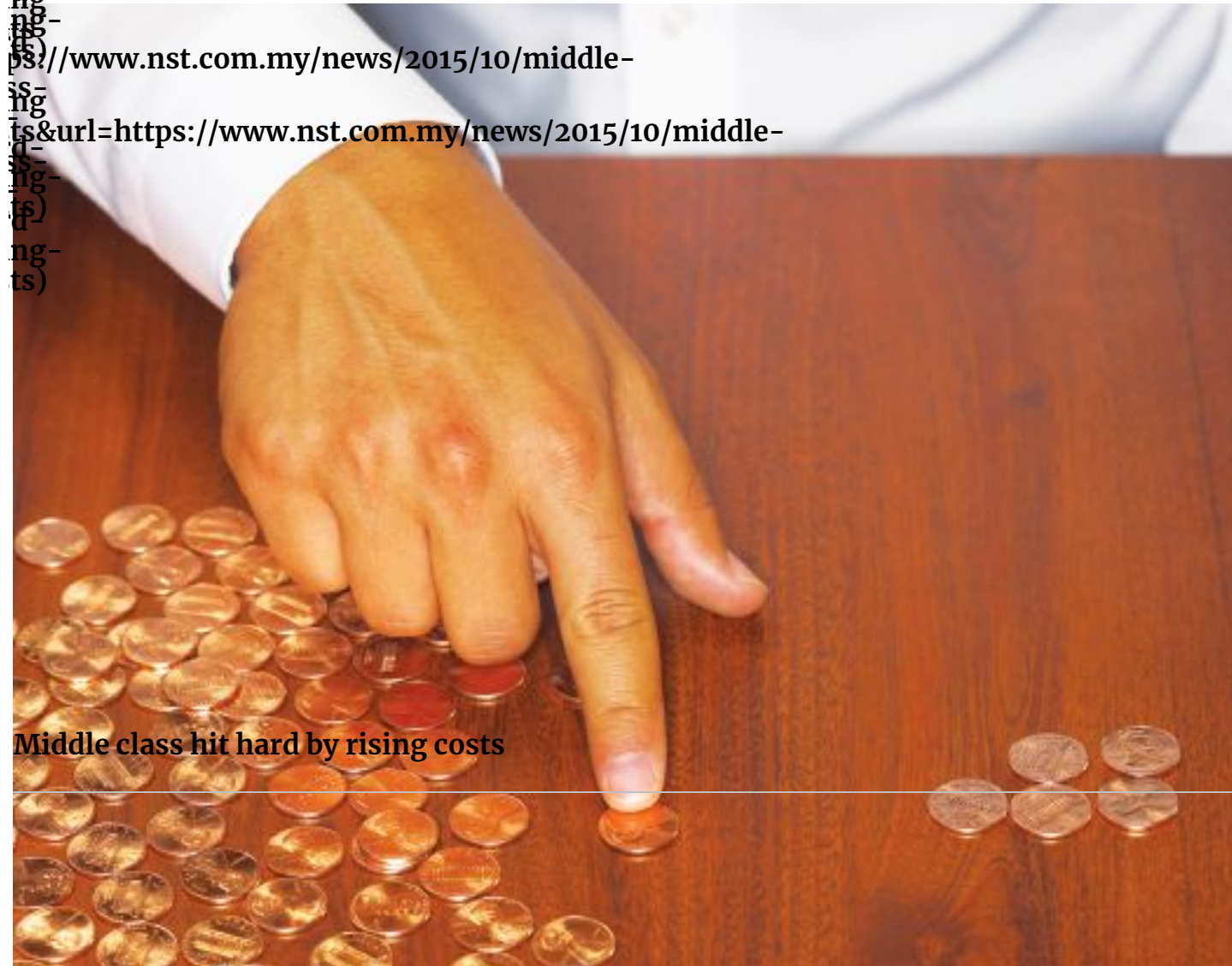


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**Middle class hit hard by rising costs**

The strengthening of the US dollar has pushed up the cost of goods having imported components.

October 19, 2015 @ 11:01am

As the 2016 Budget looms, I cannot help but dread what is coming next, especially for the middle class.  
 In the past, we would look forward to the tabling of the proposed Budget for some form of goodies that would make our lives more bearable.  
 But of late, Budget announcements or any announcement from the government fills me with dread.

Reeling from the fuel price floating mechanism that removed subsidies totally, we were then hit by price increases due to the imposition of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). These two did much to contribute to the higher cost of goods.

Even adjusted to this, the nation was suddenly hit by the weakening ringgit and the strengthening United States dollar.

That pushed the costs of goods that had any import components even higher. This again forced us to adjust our spending pattern.

Now with the ever-warping costs in 43 locations, we have seen it increased and, in some instances, doubled. We are now faced with a more costly commute and we can also expect further increases in the price of goods as logistics costs will also increase.

Alternative transport, too, will not make much of a difference as there is already a planned price hike rates for the Light Rail Transit (LRT) system and buses as well.

So with the 2016 Budget, I ask myself, what will be next? Will there be an increase in personal income tax?

Will Employees Provident Fund (EPF) contributions be increased? Will there be further erosion of our meagre income and a drastic reduction of our purchasing power?

I am not sure what is in store and I am not sure whether the welfare of the middle class – the group that is most ignored and taken for granted – will be taken care of.

I have had to resort to drastic measures. I can't help it, I have to work, the city is full of traffic and tolls are for cash only. I need to

This involves leaving a little earlier, utilising any tool at my disposal and enjoying a more scenic route that no longer involves paying to get stuck in congestion on my morning commute.

Living is actually more enjoyable now, as I take in sights

that I normally do not get to see on my mad dash through expressways.

On my second day of avoiding tolled roads, it was a pleasant drive to the office.

n Megat Shah Rizal Noor Ikhsan,  
Kuala Lumpur

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