



SWITCHING SUBSIDIES. Students wear masks depicting Indonesian President Joko Widodo with a long nose as they sit down on a road during a protest against fuel price hikes outside the presidential palace in Jakarta, Indonesia. President Widodo recently announced a sharp increase in fuel prices, saying costly government subsidies would be better spent on infrastructure and development. (AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana)

Indonesian government sharply raises fuel prices

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesia's president has announced a sharp increase in fuel prices, saying costly government subsidies would be better spent on infrastructure and development.

President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, who took office October 20, announced the price hikes at the state palace, flanked by economic and social affairs ministers.

The price of gasoline will rise from about 53 cents to 70 cents per liter, and diesel fuel from 45 cents to 61 cents.

Police were deployed to guard some gasoline stations in the capital, Jakarta, as long lines of cars and motorbikes waited to fill their tanks before the increases took effect.

"From time to time, as a nation, we are faced with difficult choices," said

Jokowi, who had vowed to be ready to make unpopular decisions for the sake of the people. "However, we have to choose and make a decision."

He said the government held a series of discussions and decided it was better to switch the subsidies to productive investment.

Students in some provincial capitals staged protests prior to the announcement.

The announcement came as the global price of oil had plummeted 31 percent in just five months, a surprising drop after a four-year period of prices near or above \$100 per barrel.

Indonesia's last fuel price hike, in June last year, was met by angry protests in which thousands of students took to the streets across the country.

Thousands line up to vote in Indian Kashmir

By Aijaz Hussain
The Associated Press

SRINAGAR, India — Thousands of voters lined up to cast their votes in state elections in Indian Kashmir amid a boycott call by Muslim separatist groups who reject India's sovereignty over the disputed Himalayan region.

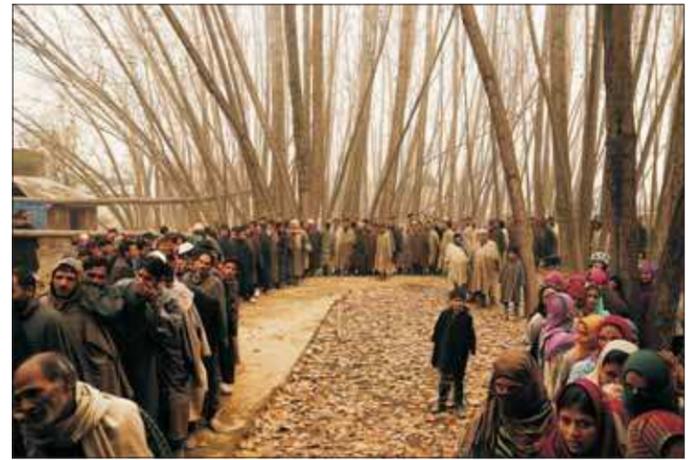
Voter turnout was moderate last month with the temperatures low and skies overcast. Thousands of paramilitary soldiers and police officers patrolled near polling stations as voting opened in villages and towns. Polling was brisk in some places and long lines of voters stretched around polling booths north of the main city of Srinagar.

The elections are to be held in five phases through December 23 in a staggered process that allows the government to deploy thousands of troops to prevent any outbreak of violence.

Pro-India Kashmiri parties say the elections will boost development and help address civic issues, while separatists say the polls are an illegitimate exercise under military occupation. In recent days, authorities have detained hundreds of separatist leaders and activists who called for a boycott of the elections.

The multistage voting will elect a local government — a chief minister who will serve as the state's top official and a council of ministers — from the pro-India parties participating in the elections.

Prime Minister Narendra



FIVE-PHASE ELECTION. Kashmiris (top photo) stand in queue to cast their votes outside a polling station during the first phase of voting for the Jammu and Kashmir state assembly elections at Shadipora, on the outskirts of Srinagar in Indian controlled Kashmir. In the bottom photo, an Indian policeman assists an elderly Kashmiri woman casting her vote during the first phase of voting in Wangipora, 24 miles north of Srinagar. Thousands lined up to cast their votes amid a boycott call by Muslim separatist groups who reject India's sovereignty over the disputed Himalayan region. (AP Photos/Mukhtar Khan)

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party has been campaigning heavily, and for the first time is hoping to win a sizeable number of seats in India's only Muslim-majority state.

Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan and both countries claim it in its entirety.

Nearly a dozen rebel groups have been fighting against Indian rule since 1989, seeking independence for Kashmir or its merger with Pakistan. About 68,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

State elections were also held in the central Indian state of Jharkhand.

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