Nigerian fuel prices set to rise, unions to resist

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The fuel stations across Nigeria that drew long queues last week when the government announced a sharp increase in petrol prices were mostly empty yesterday when motorists trooped there in droves, asking what had happened to the hike. The government said on Monday that the petrol price would increase by as much as $1 a gallon. But motorists responded to the announcement with a massive protest, blocking roads and cutting off fuel supplies to the country's cities.

The government had been warned by the international community against raising petrol prices, which are seen as a key factor in the country's economic downturn. But the government said the increase was necessary to bring down the budget deficit and boost economic growth.

The opposition called for a repeal of the hike, saying it would only make life worse for Nigerians. "This is nothing short of economic suicide," said the leader of the opposition party. "The government should not be so insensitive to the suffering of the masses."