

The Star - Consumers still sour over sugar shortage

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KUALA LUMPUR: A day after fine sugar was made a controlled item, many users said their problems have not been solved.

The Indian Muslim Restaurant Owners Association said sugar was still being sold at black market prices.

We are at the mercy of the suppliers (wholesalers and distributors) as they control the market, its president Syed Jamarul Khan said.

On Tuesday, the Government declared fine sugar a controlled item, with retail prices fixed at RM1.55 a kg for Peninsular Malaysia and RM1.65 a kg for Sabah and Sarawak effective from yesterday. Previously, only coarse sugar, priced at RM1.45 a kg, was a controlled item.

Syed Jamarul claimed that consumers had had to pay more for sugar because suppliers had created the shortage.

Food outlets surveyed yesterday also complained that they were still having difficulty getting coarse sugar.

Commons Cafe manager Susan Beh, whose outlet is in Phileo Damansara, said she had had to make do with fine sugar, bought from hypermarkets previously at RM1.90 a kg.

I have not been able to buy coarse sugar for the past four months, she said.

Malaysian Indian Restaurant Owners Association president Datuk R. Ramalingam said members would be forced to hike the price of *teh tarik* and coffee if hoarding continued.

As at today, a 50kg bag of coarse sugar is still being sold at RM85 or RM90 when it should be RM70. The distributors are issuing receipts at the lower price while over-charging by up to RM20, he said.

Meanwhile, Deputy Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk S. Veerasingham said wholesalers and distributors caught hoarding sugar would have their licences revoked on the spot.

He said the ministry's enforcement officers would also immediately cancel the licences of those found charging above the prices fixed.

We have directed the four sugar manufacturers to raise their production capacity by 15% to ensure that there is no shortage during the coming festive season, Veerasingham said yesterday.

Enforcement officials, he added, had been stationed at the four factories to make sure that there would be no shortfall in production.

We will also publicise a list of the sugar wholesalers and distributors so that traders will not be fleeced, he said.