

## The Star : High prices of veggies blamed on middlemen

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KEPALA BATAS: There are unscrupulous middlemen who inflate the prices of vegetables up to five times more than its farm price.

Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Mohd Shafie Apdal said the farm price of 1kg of tomatoes in Cameron Highlands was only 90 sen.

But when the supply reaches the Selayang market, for example, the tomatoes are being retailed up to RM4.50 per kilo.

There are just too many middlemen involved in the distribution chain of grocery items that could have inflated the prices, he said after presenting aid to 189 flood victims in Kampung Rantau Panjang here yesterday.

Mohd Shafie said the prices of fish, vegetables and meat, which were not under the price control list, varied from stall to stall in a market.

Based on personal observation, the prices of goods quoted by the stalls at the market entrance are a little higher than those located deeper inside the market.

Perhaps the front stalls have to pay higher rent. But as a wise consumer, we must compare prices first before making our purchases, he added.

On fears of a chicken shortage during the coming Hari Raya, he said there was ample supply, noting that the country currently produced 22 million birds a month.

In fact, we are exporting chicken to Singapore. If there is a shortage, we will stop the exports first, he said.

On the shortage of cooking oil in packets of RM2.50 per kilo in several states, Mohd Shafie said he had told Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui to get the manufacturers to increase production.

The shortage is so far only in Terengganu, Pahang, Sarawak and Johor. Hopefully, this problem will be resolved in a couple of days, he added.