

Bernama : Festive Season Puts To Test Spending Habits

Written by Administrator

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The tug-a-war between Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs and traders ended up with a compromise where consumers have to pay RM6.00 per kilo for chicken from RM5.60 previously.

Pix: Zulfaidi

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 14 (Bernama) -- The festive season is back again and puts to test the spending habits of the consumers, this time particularly the civil servants who received a handsome pay increase in July.

However, it is still a tough balancing act for the 1.2 million civil servants in managing their budget during this Hari Raya because they may not be receiving their much-anticipated annual bonus like in the previous years.

PRICES ONLY KEEP SPIRALLING

And to add insult to injury, like in the previous years, the prices of goods have shot up.

Nevertheless, the teeming shopping centres stand testimony to the fact that the 'shop till you drop' culture still persists. A further testimony to this is the beeline behind the counters during festive sales, cheap sales, stock clearance sales and year end sales.

CONSUMERS CORNERED

According to the Federation of Malaysian Consumers Association's (FOMCA) Communication Director Mohd Yusof Abdul Rahman, consumers are presently feeling the heat.

"Although the government has given assurance that the prices would be monitored and kept under control under Ops Gaji, yet it did not help in keeping the prices in check," he told Bernama.

He pointed out this happened because the existing laws cover only the goods under the Price Control Act 1946.

"Action can only be taken against traders who fail to display price tags or the price list. It only involves the retailers, exempting producers and wholesalers.

"At times a peculiar situation happens where the producers and retailers sell above the ceiling price. This leaves traders in a dilemma in selling the goods. This is what happened when there was a run for sugar and cooking oil sometime back," said Mohd Yusof.

PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYERS IN A LIMBO?

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While the civil servants can still afford to smile despite the current scenario, a big segment of the private sector employees are in a limbo. According to Mohd Yusof, this group is the most affected by the rising prices, especially those who don't receive regular increments. "Most private companies don't provide cost of living allowance (cola). Maybe multinationals, government linked companies (GLC) or the major ones provide good remuneration for their employees. "What about the smaller companies, the small and medium scale industry, farmers, fishermen and so on," he asked.

FOMCA'S PROPOSAL

Consumers have no choice but put up with the adversities. Whether they realise or not, consumers are often the victim of unscrupulous traders who don't fear any legal action. FOMCA again appeals to the ministry to legislate the Fair Trade Act to check on profiteering. At the same time, he also emphasised again on FOMCA's proposal that a Price Commission be established. "Currently all request for price increases on price controlled items or tariffs (for utility companies or private concessions) is between the producers/providers and the government without involving the consumer's representative. "The Price Commission represented by government agencies, private companies, and representatives of consumer associations would consider whether the request is justified," said Mohd Yusof.

CONSUMER RIGHTS

The challenges faced by the consumers in Malaysia show that they have to exercise their rights and role as responsible consumers. According to Mohd Yusof, consumers must stick to the four elements highlighted in the ministry's campaign namely, buy products of quality, make price comparisons, choose the best services and make the right choice. Consumers too must come forward to lodge a complaint if there is sudden rise in the prices. The complaints can be forwarded to the Ministry's Enforcement Division through the hotline 1-800-886-800, web site: <http://e-aduan.kpdnhep.gov.my> or sms: 32255 or to the National Consumers Complaint Centre at 03-78779000 or through the web site: www.nccc.org.my. "The complaints are important for FOMCA to know whether if there is a real increase in the prices, that possibly is due to price manipulation by the producer, wholesaler or trader. "Apart from that, the complaints would also allow action to be taken on the premise involved," said Mohd Yusof.

What ever said and done, advice given or enforcement action taken, it is all left to the consumers to keep unscrupulous traders at bay.

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