

## The Star : Government doing its best to shield consumers

Written by Administrator

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KUALA LUMPUR: The price rise in commodities is a world phenomenon beyond the Government's control, said Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Shafie Apdal. However, he said, the Government had been taking proactive steps to contain the situation to ensure that the people would not face problems coping with rising prices. We do not want people to suffer. That's why we are doing our best to overcome the problem, he said.

He said the ministry was conducting meetings and discussions with the business community to ensure that it did not increase prices excessively. We ask them not to make excessive profits but make reasonable adjustments so that it wouldn't be a loss for them because they are not there to make losses, he said, adding that he had also instructed his officers to take stern action against those who increased their prices ridiculously. He said it was tough for the business community because it was also importing materials from abroad, which were costlier than before. We cannot be pressuring them all the while when we know that the price has gone up by 60% to 80%, he said.

Shafie said awareness campaigns had also been organised to encourage the public to be smarter consumers. My advice is to buy things that are necessities and be selective when purchasing goods, he added. He said it was important for consumers to understand the concept of energy-saving. If there is no need to switch on the light, don't do it, and it is the same for travelling. In many countries, people are encouraged to carpool and use public transport, he said.

On the government's subsidy, he said it was spending about RM15mil a year on cooking oil while RM10.6bil was spent on the subsidy for gas, oil and petrol so far this year. Looking at the increase in petrol prices, the figure will easily shoot up to RM15bil by year-end, he said, referring to the subsidy. Crude oil is currently selling at US\$92 (RM307) per barrel, but the Government has not increased the retail price of petrol. The world prices of steel, sugar and wheat have also shot up.

Deputy Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk S. Veerasingam said the local prices of goods were based according to global market trends. Comparatively, the prices of Malaysia's essential goods and services are one of the lowest in the region, he said.