

The Star : Consumers should boycott greedy traders

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Every festival, traders will always try to take advantage by increasing the prices of goods. This has become a ritual and, except for controlled items, there is little that the Government can do about it.

Yet, the trade unions are calling for a boycott of certain goods to force shopkeepers and sellers to reduce prices. This is, however, the wrong approach.

As Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Shafie Apdal has pointed out, they should boycott outlets which increase prices instead.

What is surprising was the reason given by unions for their action: they want to force the Government to take action against the profiteers. This is not going to happen since there is no official intention to do so.

It also cannot be done because the Government cannot and should not interfere in a free market unless traders are selling controlled goods above the recommended prices.

The minister has asked consumers to shop wisely and to compare prices before buying. If unscrupulous traders find that their business is suffering because of their actions, they will not continue with this practice of making a quick buck.

This is the only sensible approach to tackle this issue. Many shops and food sellers have started increasing prices on the basis that civil servants were given a huge pay increase.

This is definitely unacceptable since traders cannot raise prices every time workers, either in the public or private sector, have a salary revision.

The public may be prepared to pay if new taxes are introduced or the prices of petroleum products have gone up due to a reduction in subsidy.

There is no doubt that prices of many goods, both manufactured and agricultural, have gone up in recent months, and those who go marketing are feeling the pinch. This is making government efforts at controlling inflation all the more difficult.

Workers should understand it is pointless to have higher wages if prices of goods go up in tandem. They will not be able to enjoy the extra take-home pay.

But this is something difficult to sell to union leaders and their members, whose mentality is that they must have a regular pay rise regardless of the consequences.

It also cannot be over-emphasised that consumers must shop wisely and should not allow greedy traders to exploit them. This is an individual choice and no one can decide for them.

Traders and hawkers should not be allowed to enjoy the pay increase of workers by charging more for their goods and services. This will not help ease the financial burden on the working class.

COMMENT

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