

NST : Will boycott bring prices down?

Written by Administrator

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Is the boycott call by the Malaysian Trades Union Congress a step in the right direction towards curtailing escalating prices or is it merely a waste of time?

PATRICK SENNYAH speaks to MTUC president Syed Shahir Syed Mohamud and Deputy Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk S. Veerasingam on the issue.

Q: Would this boycott work?
A: This is our way of drawing the attention of the government to the seriousness of the recent price hikes. We are happy that our actions managed to draw the government's attention to the plight of consumers. Despite the recent pay hike for civil servants, it barely commensurates with the rising prices of essential goods.

Q: What about those in the private sector who have not had any pay hike lately? So many families are finding great difficulty in making ends meet.
A: The MTUC is, therefore, trying to highlight the seriousness of this problem and get the government to do something about it.

Q: Will you actually see results?
A: It is a tough campaign. We never said it was going to be easy to get the public to co-operate and stop buying certain products. However, although it is an uphill task, this is something serious which has to be done. The prices have reached the point where something drastic has to be done.

Q: Are you happy with the progress so far?
A: Actually, we are a bit disturbed by the responses we have received from consumer organisations. They are the ones who should take the lead and be serious about this issue. We know many are questioning the rationale for our action but, like I said, someone has to do something.

Q: What kind of action are you expecting from the government?
A: For one, they could try increasing enforcement.

The number of enforcement staff they have now is less than 3,000, while there are thousands of outlets nationwide like wet markets, night markets, etc.
Q: How long would the boycott last?
A: We will continue from time to time. We cannot do it continuously.

This is just one of the many steps we are taking to help consumers fight the price hikes.
The issue of a minimum wage of RM900 and RM300 cost of living allowance is also something we have been fighting for years. We hope the government will take a serious look at this issue.

Datuk S. Veerasingam
Q: What is your opinion of the boycott?
A: We cannot boycott all shops. This would be impossible... Consumers need these items to survive. It is MTUC's right to organise the boycott but, in my opinion, it is not really necessary.

Q: Your suggestion?
A: It is all actually up to consumers. In some shops, the controlled items are sometimes sold cheaper than the non-controlled items. We cannot curtail economic growth. Consumers should take it upon themselves to shop around for the best bargains. Some shops definitely sell items at a higher price than others. What consumers can do is inform us about those who hike the price of controlled items.
Q: So, enforcement is the answer?
A: Definitely. I don't think we can achieve much with a boycott.

If you come across traders who are guilty of unreasonable price hikes, please contact enforcement officers at our toll-free number 1-800-886-800 or send an SMS to 32255.

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