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PUTRAJAYA: A blanket boycott on all market traders over rising prices of essential goods will adversely affect the economy, Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Shafie Apdal said. Instead, Shafie, called on the public to look for alternatives or buy from traders who offer reasonable rates.

Shafie, who clearly did not support the umbrella union bodies Cuepacs' and MTUC's call for the blanket boycott on market traders, said: "Be a smart consumer and look for cheaper alternatives. There are markets and places where you can still buy goods at reasonable prices," he said, adding that four to five enforcement officers would be deployed to all the main markets to check on unscrupulous traders who raised the prices of essential goods. Consumers must exercise their right by comparing prices to avoid traders who hike prices. This will force them to lower their prices," he told a press conference at his ministry here yesterday.

Shafie said the ministry would take stern action against errant traders who sell price-controlled items above the ceiling prices. "Please give us the information and we will act," said Shafie, who called on the public, including the union bodies to call the ministry's hotline at 1-800-886-800 to report such traders.

He said that between Sept 13 and 23, the ministry's enforcement officers checked 130,374 premises and seized RM78,114 worth of goods and issued fines totalling RM37,850 to 230 traders, comprising wholesalers and retailers.

On Sunday, MTUC and the civil servants umbrella union body Cuepacs launched a nationwide boycott campaign against rising prices of essential goods.