

NST : RISING FOOD PRICES: Sundry shops facing uphill battle

Written by Administrator

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Sundry shops are struggling in the face of competition from hypermarkets but there are many who have managed to survive, thanks to their loyal customers.

MANY sundry shops have been forced out of business by hypermarkets and supermarkets.

The few that survive are struggling to keep going. Loyal patrons and the personalised service that they offer have helped to keep them afloat.

Maggie Lim, a sundry shop owner in Bangsar, said business was not like it used to be 30 years ago.

"We are losing out to hypermarkets. Customers only walk into our shop when they need one or two items," she said.

"But we still have some loyal customers, who prefer our family-run store to supermarkets.

"We still sell things that you cannot get anywhere else, like biscuits by the kilogramme, oil lamps and wooden backscratchers."

Maggie said one of the drawing points is the "the element of personal touch", which has enabled her customers to remain loyal.

Supermarkets and hypermarkets continually reduce prices to remain competitive, something which sundry shops cannot afford to.

"We can't reduce our prices like the hypermarkets as we don't buy in huge numbers from suppliers," said Maggie.

Rising prices of goods, some sundry shop owners fear, could further erode their business.

Yet not every small trader is doing badly. Jothee Mini Market in Butterworth, Penang is one of the sundry shops that continues to do well.

Proprietor P. Gunasegaran @ Kumar said sundry shops would be around for a while yet as they could provide some items that the hypermarkets and supermarkets cannot.

"At sundry shops, the customers are at liberty to check the goods they are buying, and we pack the goods according to their needs and wishes," he said.

"At supermarkets and hypermarkets, fast moving goods are sold slightly cheaper whereas slow moving goods cost slightly higher than our prices.

"In our kind of business, customer satisfaction is the magic word. Once they have faith in you and are happy with the quality of the goods you sell, they will come back over and over.

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"In fact, wholesalers prefer to supply goods to sundry shops rather than the supermarkets.

"That's because our credit period is two weeks while it's three months for the supermarkets."