

The Star : Expect drastic changes, says Shahrir

Written by Administrator

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PUTRAJAYA: Consumers can expect drastic changes to be made by the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry including doing away with controlling prices for certain essential goods.

But the ministry assures consumers that their interests would be taken care of with the introduction of new mechanisms.

Stating, "we will turn everything inside out," new minister Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad said that the Prime Minister had told all ministers to be prepared to do anything to make things better in the country.

"Whatever we do, we must ensure there is abundant and sufficient supply (of consumer goods)," he told reporters here on Monday after taking over as minister from Datuk Shafie Apdal at the ministry.

He said as far as supply was concerned it was a concerted effort from a few ministries including Agriculture and Agro-based Industries, Plantation Industries and Commodities, and International Trade and Industry.

Shahrir added that he was also looking into the possibility of having an open market and let prices be determined by market forces.

He said everyone was labouring under the perception that Malaysia was a big market when actually it was quite small making it easy for a few businessmen and manufacturers to control the market.

"We know there is always the AFTA (Asean Free Trade Area); if we allow products to enter the Asean region, we may have a better price system and supply may be better.

"These are some of the things we have to look at," he added.

Shahrir said price control to him was not realistic, as the supply cannot be controlled as well.

Demand, he said, was well understood but if the supply was not within control, then artificial barriers to the supply would emerge and prices would still not be real.

"When we do not know the real price, how can we have a price control; (we) might be artificially controlling the price," he said, joking that he was glad the spate of price increases which started some time November last year was over.

On the first issue to be tackled by him, Shahrir said he needed time to meet ministry officers to decide, including plans to meet manufacturers who are seeking price increases for certain goods.