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More items may come under price control

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SEPANG, Sun. - The Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry is looking into gazetting more consumer goods including perishables as price controlled and controlled items due to the indiscriminate increases in prices by businessmen.

Its minister Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayub said the directive came from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The ministry has set up a steering committee to monitor the price movements of goods and identify the items to be gazetted.

He said the move was intended to curb profiteering. The ministry would not hesitate to expand the number of controlled items to remind traders who chose to be indifferent to the ministry's calls, advice and even regulations by increasing the prices of goods.

"We will monitor the price fluctuations of the goods and use it as an indicator to decide which items to include in the list," he told reporters after launching the Emville Golf Resort Berhad, in Dengkil near here.

He said the ministry had wide powers to stabilise the prices of goods under the Price Control Act 1946 and Control of Supplies Act 1961.

The Price Control Act ensures that prices of controlled items are not increased by traders without prior approval from the Government, while the Control of Supplies Act allows the Ministry to ensure that traders do not hoard goods to force an increase in the prices.

He said the ministry would let market forces determine fair and competitive prices if traders did not take advantage of the current situation to increase prices.

To date, the 12 price-controlled items are petrol, diesel, kerosene, cooking gas, sugar, wheat flour, cement, chicken, mild steel bars, bread, cooking oil and fertiliser.

The 20 controlled items (to ensure sufficient supply) include sugar, milk and milk products, salt, cement, flour, cooking oil, bread, spirit and gasoline, formic acid and fuel oil, liquefied petroleum gas, insecticide and fertiliser.

The ministry has also gazetted 25 other foodstuffs under the Supply Control Act 1961 from Oct 1 until the Hari Raya and Chinese New Year celebrations next year.

The items include butter, cheese, margarine, bottled and packet drinks, jelly, meat, eggs, fruits, onions and garlic.

Megat Junid said the list of price controlled and controlled items may be expanded to include other items if the ministry found evidence of upward and unjustified price movements.

Megat Junid also asked people to show restraint in spending and urged the business community as well to co-operate in efforts to curb inflation.

The ministry would embark on a nationwide Buy Malaysian campaign, with road-shows and exhibitions, after the festivals.

He said the local manufacturing industry was comparatively new and the products needed considerable promotion from the Government.

"We hope that the exhibition will help to push sales of local products. Therefore, manufacturers of local products must emphasise on standards, quality as well as competitive prices."

"Without publicity, Malaysian-made goods, even if competitively priced and of top quality, cannot make much headway," he said. Consumers must know which products were on the market and each brand must make an impact.

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