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Ceiling prices for packaged food items

Eirmalasang Bani

THE Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry will impose ceiling prices for local and imported canned, packaged and bottled foodstuff to overcome profiteering, its minister Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayob said yesterday.

Megat Junid said the move to fix a ceiling price for more than 600 such food items in the country will be done in stages as the ministry needs to do a thorough study on the matter.

For starters, the ministry hopes to impose the ceiling prices of canned food and bottled mineral water by the end of the year.

"Retailers can sell at any price below the ceiling price. If they refuse to follow the prices imposed by the Government, we may introduce a profiteering law which will be tough for them," Megat Junid said after attending the ministry's bi-monthly assembly in Kuala Lumpur.

Profiteering law has yet to be implemented anywhere in the world.

He was also asked to comment on the appeal by the Federation of Livestock Farmers Associations of Malaysia to further increase the price of chickens.

Megat Junid said farmers should wait until the twin festivals are over before asking for a price increase.

"Forget about appealing until both festivals are over," he said.

The ministry had on December 12 last year announced a 15-sen increase on the price of chicken from RM2.90 to RM3.05, due to the price increase on chicken feed which is mostly imported from the US.

He said farmers should be willing to sacrifice some of their profits for the country.

When asked to comment on moves by consumers to stock up essential goods such as sardines and flour in light of the shortage of such food items in the country, Megat Junid said consumers should not panic.

He said the Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority and PadiBeras Nasional Bhd will hold 160 Pasar Tani outlets three days after Hari Raya to ensure that food items can be obtained at reasonable prices.

Figures provided by the ministry showed that it seized illegal goods valued at RM31.5 million under Copyright Act (RM10.7 million), Trade Description Act 1972 (RM10.1 million), Price Control Act 1946 (RM9.3 million), Weight and Measures Act 1972 (RM764,000), Direct Selling Act 1993 (RM500,000) and Supplier Control Act 1961 (RM438,000).

The ministry also collected RM1.7 million in compounds and RM600,000 in fines from errant traders last year.

Bernama reports: The Government will meet importers today to identify the necessary items that merit importation, Megat Junid said.

The meeting will also identify supplier countries which could offer items at comparatively cheaper prices, he said this after breaking fast at Kampung Sungai Kuching, 30km from Teluk Intan on Sunday night.

Megat Junid said International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and he will meet the importers.

He said: "We don't need to import too much butter, beverages, designer apparels and furniture which are sometimes left unsold. This causes currency immobility since these items are imported using the US dollar."

The meeting will enable the Government source imported items to cheaper supplier countries like onions from Thailand and potatoes from Indonesia, he said.

Its outcome will be forwarded to the National Economic Action Council chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for further action in efforts to reduce importation of unnecessary items, he said.

Megat Junid also said that Asean countries are expected to hold special talks soon on intra-Asean trade using local currencies, a move which he said will benefit members of the regional grouping.

Megat Junid said he was confident that Malaysia's neighbours in Asean would be receptive to the proposed scheme which could help especially those whose currencies had depreciated steeply against the US dollar.

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