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Generic drugs are so much cheaper

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"CURE Our Economic Ills" and "Say No to IMF's Bitter Pills" were two catchy slogans found on Buy Malaysian pharmaceutical posters unveiled by the Malaysian Organisation of Pharmaceutical Industries (Mopi) last April.

The posters, which are now a common sight at hospitals, clinics and pharmacies throughout the country, is an assertion of Mopi's commitment to support the Buy Malaysian campaign through the promotion of the use of locally-produced generic drugs.

This follows the call by Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng to both public and private medical practitioners to optimise the use of locally-produced generic drugs in view of the current economic situation.

"These local products, cheaper and of equal quality when compared with branded, imported products, also encourage effective cost containment without compromising on effective healthcare in the country," said Mopi president David Ho.

As a comparison, Ho pointed out that some locally manufactured anti-hypertensive drugs are 758 per cent cheaper than imported ones. Antibiotics cost 560 per cent less and anti-viral drugs 289 per cent cheaper.

Mopi's inclination to introduce a more affordable alternative without compromising on quality, should be emulated by other manufacturers of local goods.

Such a move is crucial to bridge the existing gap in the country's current account deficit, correct the imbalance in the balance of payments and ease inflationary pressures.

Mobilising the people to place their faith in Made-in-Malaysia merchandise may sound easy. This can be achieved by educating consumers on the availability of the locally-made goods and services. The difficult part lies in sustaining their interest over the long term.

Unless manufacturers consistently stress on quality, durability, reliability and affordability - which are prime attractions of Malaysian-made products - it will not take long before the "buy local first" enthusiasm fizzles out.

However, feeling dejected or cheated over the fact that the product has failed miserably to live up to their expectations, do not give consumers a good reason to idolise imported stuff. They should instead reject the inferior ones and support those which impress in quality.

This way, market forces are let to rule and the notion of supply and demand will weed out the bad apples in the industry and services.

In short, quality is a two-way matter. If Malaysian consumers accept certain low standards, goods of similar quality will continue to flood the market. If poor service is tolerated, the providers of such poor service will proliferate and even prosper.

Consumers should be bold enough to draw the line by insisting on the best in quality of goods and services from Malaysian manufacturers and service providers.

As such, Mopi's concerted efforts in bringing together 32 pharmaceutical manufacturing companies with factories or facilities in Malaysia, all licensed by the Health Ministry's Drug Control Authority, deserves true praise.

In the last few years, Mopi has invested more than RM100 million in the upgrading and modernisation of the industry by setting up new plants and

areas of high-technology manufacturing.

Mopi members are actively engaged in research and development for product development, formulation improvement and the drug delivery system. They currently produce 35 per cent of Malaysia's medicine requirement.

Thus, the industry has rapidly developed and evolved into a modern industry capable of producing a wide range of internationally accepted products, which meet the stringent standards of Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP).

On a wider perspective, companies should also devote more efforts for effective branding, marketing and promotion of their goods. They should beef up their distribution networks to ensure the availability of their products to end-users on a borderless basis.

Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz has advised local businesses against looking at exports as "something that they do only when there is a surplus from domestic orders or when necessary, or even as an afterthought".

Launching of this year's Industrial Excellence Awards, Rafidah hoped these would spur companies to be more aware of the importance of managing quality and maintaining competition in the global market.

There are four categories for the awards: Production Excellence Award, Export (Trade) Excellence Award, Export (Service) Excellence Award and Quality Management Award. Two special awards are also being introduced this year - for Malaysian Brand Products and Design.

In dismissing the call that "Buy Malaysian" is synonymous to propogating economic nationalism, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said Malaysians simply have to buy local products because imported goods have become more expensive as a result of the ringgit depreciation.

If all Malaysians were to respond to the call, he said the national economy would recover faster.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, meanwhile, has also chided the Malaysian rich and famous who refused to change their perception about local products and do not bother to give their support to the "Buy Malaysian" campaign.

He also expressed surprise that the people are not aware that Malaysia's furniture and furnishing have been very well received internationally.

To ensure the campaign's success, four major newspapers - the New Straits Times, The Star, Sin Chew Jit Poh and Tamil Nesan have stepped forward to offer an attractive package for local manufacturers to advertise their products for six weeks at RM1,500.

The advertisements, to appear every Friday, will promote a maximum of three products.

COMING EVENTS:

* Dr Mahathir will launch two "Love Malaysia, Buy Malaysian" exhibitions organised by the National Artistes, Singers and Songwriters Association (Papita) and the Selangor MCA Youth on July 7 and 10 respectively.

* Papita will hold an exhibition at the Taipan Triangle in USJ 5, Subang Jaya, from July 5 to 25.

* The Love Malaysia Consumer and Trade Fair '98 exhibition will be held at the Malaysia International Exhibition and Showroom, Mines Resort City, from July 10 to 19.

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