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Mahathir-Boycott

NGOs NEED NOT BE OVERZEALOUS IN CHICKEN BOYCOTT, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 30 (Bernama) -- Non-governmental organisations spearheading an on-going nation-wide public boycott of chicken and other over-priced items should not be overzealous in pursuing their cause, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

They should not be overly pressuring in alienating all traders, he said referring to the boycott launched two days before Christmas by two unions, a national consumer organisation and a youth council.

"I believe we need not have to be too hasty. We must remember that the sellers that we're boycotting also want to earn a living, some of them are not well off ... they are poor," he said.

He was responding to reporters who approached him on the matter after opening an international conference on religious studies here today.

The prime minister said mounting a general boycott of traders should also take into account that it is the petty traders who would be affected most.

He said more appropriate action could be taken against traders known to be blatantly profiteering from items that were actually cheaply-priced.

The current boycott was initiated by the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC), Cuepacs, the largest public sector employees union, Fomca, the federation of consumers associations and the Malaysian Youth Council.

"But we don't have to boycott all. The stall operators don't earn that much, if they can get 20 ringgit a day and yet we boycott them, what is there for them to earn," he said.

As for the seasonal price increases especially during festive seasons, Dr Mahathir said the basic principle of supply and demand came into play as limited supply would push prices up.

"But in Malaysia price increases are not abrupt and if they do go up the cost factors are taken into account," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry has been specifically tasked with monitoring supply situation and price movements.

The government only controlled prices of essential items, including sugar and flour and monitored the price movements for other items.

The government would step in to stabilise prices the moment there was excessive profiteering, he said.

Dr Mahathir said price increases could be curtailed if consumers themselves choose not to pay for over-priced goods.

"During festive seasons, prices soar and supply is short. Consumers in need of such goods are willing to pay high prices. If they are not willing to pay such high prices, the traders will have to bring down the prices. So don't pay (if the prices are high)," the prime minister added.

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