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Ill-planned chicken boycott shows lack of consumer leadership

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I REFER to the ill-planned chicken boycott and the various claims by various diverse groups indulging in their latest hobby - consumerism and boycotts!

These groups, despite coming from diverse backgrounds and political aspirations, have decided to call for a "boycott" which has failed miserably nationwide.

The last time they called for a boycott, one of their own was found in a fast-food eatery buying chicken while another against "soft drinks" ended disastrously in the 80s!

This time, another went on the defensive after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad rightly pointed out that the "boycott" lacked merit and would cause more harm than good.

The futility of this ill-planned adventure was entrenched when Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin provided documentation and research statistics on the sales figures of the birds which showed the "boycott" had absolutely no impact nationwide.

As a result, the question of consumer leadership or lack of it in the country is discussed nationwide.

First, why are trade union groups, instead of concentrating on workers' issues, making direct intervention in consumer issues?

What adds to the ongoing confusion is when consumer associations publicly criticise each other on policies pertaining to price increases, water cuts and boycotts.

The Consumer Protection Act in its present form is a toothless tiger.

The National Consumer Council, on the other hand, needs a serious revamp and "infusion of new blood".

Despite the lack of funding, manpower and other "irritations", consumer groups must regain their leadership of the movement from trade unions. And as long as consumer interests play second fiddle to "business and trade priorities", consumer interest will be sacrificed on the altar of obese profits.

A strong professionally-led consumer movement, whose actions are supported by professionally-carried out surveys, will be appreciated by all consumers.