

Help hawkers lower prices, DAP and MCA tell gov't

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Amidst inflationary pressure, both DAP and MCA have jumped on ways to lower costs and boost the number of hawkers and petty food traders in the country.

While DAP's secretary general Lim Guan Eng opposed a privately-operated health scan of all hawkers by the Health Ministry, MCA said it backed Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's suggestion to abolish trade license fees for all hawkers.

"Why can't the Health Ministry conduct these courses free of charge or accept a nominal payment instead of allowing private companies to make money from low-income groups like hawkers? Hawkers upset at the RM50 charge are asking whether this is privatisation or piratisation," Lim (left) said in a statement issued on Friday.

Under the threat of a fine of up to RM10,000 or a maximum jail term of two years, the ministry has mandated all hawkers to register themselves for a food-handling course that costs RM50 and run by some six private contractors.

Hawkers have a deadline of Jan 23 to do so in order to be certified, under a 2009 Food Hygiene regulation. Lim however questioned the costly move, as he said that both the Penang Town Council (MPPP) and Seberang Perai Town Council (MPSP) now give such courses for free.

"The state government supports any efforts to improve food safety and hygienic standards. There should be no compromise on health enforcement with more than 10,000 cases of food poisoning cases reported last year.

"However, reducing food poisoning incidents should not be exploited as a pretext to allow some private companies to earn money," Lim wrote in the statement.

He added that in line with Penang's bid to keep hawker's operation costs down, he would instruct Penang state exco member for Health Dr Afif Bahardin to write to the federal government to stop this "hardhearted" move.

Curb profiteering

Meanwhile, MCA vice president Chua Tee Yong has raised a similar issue on capping

hawker's operating costs. While he backed a move to abolish license fees, Chua also asked that food prices be monitored to curb profiteering.

"I agree with the Prime Minister's suggestion that local councils abolish the trade licence fee for hawkers and petty traders to create more micro-entrepreneurs and to supplement their income. However there must be monitoring to ensure that the cost savings are passed on to the consumers," Chua (right) said in a statement.

Chua said this was one way to lower the cost of living in Malaysia as "it is common now, due to the nature of their work, that most people tend to eat out."

He added that the government should also look into regulating the rental of food centres or provide tax incentives for both commercial or government buildings.

"There should be more hawker centres and food courts established to encourage competition to promote price reduction," he said.

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