

Stop criticising Shafie, says Najib

By **MERCAWATIZULFAKAR**
merga@thestar.com.my

PUTRAJAYA: Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has come to the defence of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Shafie Apdal who is under heavy criticism over the continued shortage of sugar in the market.

"Pity him. The last time it was petrol. What is next for him?" said Najib when asked to comment on calls for Shafie to resign if he failed to solve the problem.

Sugar shortage has surfaced around the country since April and despite assurances and steps taken by the Government, including increasing the

price of fine sugar, the problem has persisted.

Bandar Kuching MP Chong Chien Jen had asked Shafie to resign if he could not solve the problem in Sabah and Sarawak.

Najib, who is the cabinet committee chairman on essential goods, took note of the problem saying the Government was still monitoring the situation through the ministry.

"I have met representatives from sugar refineries and they have given their word that they will increase sugar production to solve the problem.

"I hold on to their promise. So far we have not liberalise the import of sugar. If their promise is not effective, we will resort to such an action.

"I am giving them a bit of time to see how things are on the ground. We will see, be patient," he said after chairing the National Forestry Council meeting at the Prime Minister's Department here yesterday.

Asked if Shafie was doing a good job, Najib replied, "It is not for me, it is for the Prime Minister to decide."

Following complaints in Sabah and Sarawak over the sugar shortage, Shafie had announced that naval ships would be used to transport sugar and on Monday, he announced KTM Bhd had been asked to double its sugar load and make more frequent trips from refineries in Penang to Selangor in view of the festive season.