

'Frequent monitoring needed to tackle white rice shortage'

PUTRAJAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim wants more frequent monitoring and enforcement to be carried out to address the shortage of local white rice in the market.

Anwar, who is also finance minister, said the monitoring and enforcement approaches also require changes to ensure a more effective distribution of local white rice.

"I personally have heard the concerns raised by traders regarding the shortage of local white rice," he said at the Finance Ministry's assembly yesterday.

On the recent special meeting of the National Action Council on Cost of Living (Naccol), Anwar said the government's firmness in addressing the issue of rice prices and supplies have been evident, leading to a decrease in market prices of imported white rice.

> Govt commitment in addressing issue of costs, supply of staple has led to decrease in market prices, says premier

"*Alhamdulillah*, prices have dropped by RM3, or by RM2 (per 10kg pack) at some places. Basically, between RM2 and RM3, and that's a lot for buyers and regular consumers."

Regarding the shortage of local white rice in the market, Anwar said the Naccol meeting also revealed the country has 150,000 tonnes of it to be distributed, but it is not enough for everyone.

He said at present, the rice is sold and distributed by the Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority and the Farmers Organisations Authority at a price of RM26 per

pack of 10 kg.

"In reality, our rice, sugar and crude oil prices are the cheapest in Southeast Asia and this fact is not being emphasised."

On March 19, the Agriculture and Food Security Ministry announced that the retail prices of imported white rice would be reduced by between RM2 and RM3 (per 10kg pack). It took effect on Wednesday.

The current retail price of imported white rice is between RM38 and RM45 for a 10kg pack and with the announcement of the new price range, the price for the 10kg pack would drop to RM35.

Meanwhile, in a post on his Facebook page, Anwar said the *Madani* government is standing firm in ensuring the people would not be pressured by those who want to rake in excessive profits, especially in the sale of daily necessities such as rice.

He said the government would continue to be consistent with the approach of retargeting its assistance and subsidies to ensure that they reach people in need, reflecting the concept of fairness, Bernama reported.

"If we know that the bulk subsidy approach used before had also benefitted the super-rich and foreign citizens, then why would we want it to continue?"

"That's why the subsidy must be retargeted to the hardcore poor and marginalised communities, and this of course includes the urban and rural poor."