

## Stop complaining. Do something!



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More often than not, we are more willing to find ways to 'get around' the issue instead of finding the one solution

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CHINESE New Year is around the corner, so you know what that means. Yup, food prices would go up. Households would scramble to stock up for the festive season, further driving prices.

Presently, the prices of several essential items are gradually rising and all we could hear all around are complaints and grouses from unhappy consumers.

Last week, Penang recorded the highest prices for Indian onions in the country, with some retailers charging up to RM24 per kilogramme.

Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail said according to the National Goods Price Council, the price range for the state ranged from RM4.90 to RM24 per kilogramme yesterday.

Soon, we could expect announcements that the country would face inadequate supplies of eggs and chicken. Of course, the shortage of sugar could result in an insurmountable unhappiness.

If that should happen, you'd be assured of more unhappy campers with fingers all pointing to the authorities.

Predictably, while the authorities are pressured to find solutions to all these “national issues”, the naysayers would continue wagging their tongues without any workable suggestion.

We have to admit Malaysians at large are generally complainers, which is fine except that each complaint does not seem to be followed by any valid motion that could help solve any issue.

It's kind of like how everyone would complain about the traffic woes in the city, yet no one seems to be too comfortable with sharing space with others.

A recent survey by the Centre for Governance and Political Studies (Cent-GPS) revealed that 87.3% of Malaysians in the Klang Valley were alone in their vehicles — one of the highest single driver commuter rates in the world.

The survey also stated that around 11.6% travelled with one passenger on board, while only 0.9% travelled with two other passengers on board.

Most of the respondents complained that public transport still remained difficult, with some complaining that the cost of parking at an LRT (light rail transit) or MRT (mass rapid transit) station was the same as the cost of parking at work.

According to Cent-GPS, the US was found to have a nationwide average single driver commuter rate of 66%, while the other 34% carpoolled in 2018.

In Spain, around 56% of workers commute alone by driving, while the other 44% carpool or take public transport. In Belgium, the number of single driver commuters has been declining at a rate of 5% a year to what is now believed to be only around 30%.

Now, that says a lot about Malaysians. More often than not, instead of finding the one solution that could be the best answer, we are more willing to find ways to “get around” the issue.

For instance, when sugar became a controlled item, and each household was allowed to only buy a pack per purchase, the bigger families would work around it by sending each family member to buy a pack of sugar separately.

With 10 children, one might just be able to stock up 10 extra kilogrammes in the pantry. This would be in contrast with consumers in other parts of the world.

One story that made the international headlines years ago was about consumers in a small town in Australia who managed to keep the price of eggs down, by deciding to not buy any at all!

We could also perhaps emulate the Bangladeshis and other migrant workers who are rather savvy in controlling their expenditure.

You might be familiar with this scene: Two or three foreign workers in a supermarket with huge bags and sacks that are filled with food stuff and cooking material that you might think that they are planning a huge party.

Apparently, they'd pool a certain amount of money and work out a schedule each week for a member to do bulk shopping for the group.

By doing so, each member of the collective would manage to economise their spending, especially when they buy at a wholesaler market.

Usually, the migrant workers would do their own survey and focus on shops that offer the lowest price for their basket of goods.

After all, it is a known fact that things would be cheaper when acquired in bulk.

- Now, should we apply the same formula within a group of friends or people in our neighbourhood, we might enjoy the same result that is achieved by the migrant workers.

Choose a wholesale market — say NSK or Eonsave (which are touted to be among the cheapest places to shop), buy all the goods that are on the list as decided by the group and redistribute accordingly.

A member of the collective could take charge of the chores each week. In the longer run, if everyone is on the same page, prices of essential goods could perhaps drop, according to the supply and demand theory.

Put one of those smartphones into good use. Instead of creating a group that has nothing nice to say about anything, we could perhaps turn it into a grocery-shopping pool that could benefit everyone.

The gadget that might be used to share nasty pictures or rumours could also perhaps be used as a “surveillance” tool for all the best prices for your basket of goods too, which could help others to get the best bargain around.

Just saying...

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