

## 'Government allocates RM20m to promote local products'

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It also serves as a tracking system on the whereabouts of imported items, such as which ports they are going to or had been in.

"If the items were imported but the final destination was not indicated or unclear, the ministry will seize the items.

"The condition imposed on AP holders is that the items should be sold only to industry players and factories, not retailers," he said, adding that two shipments were recently seized due to lack of disclosure on their final destinations.

The AP abuse was revealed by MyCC in the Market Review on Food Sector report published last month, which stated that the price of imported round cabbage had increased drastically.

However, Saifuddin said, the downside of the AP system was its inability to protect local chilli farmers.

"We import chillies because Cameron Highlands cannot meet the demand. Imported chillies are priced lower, and consumers are swayed by the price difference."

Saifuddin said, nevertheless, APs were important to maintain the demand of certain items, such as sugar.

Raw sugar AP is given to two main players — Central Sugars Refinery Sdn Bhd and MSM Malaysia Holdings Bhd.

"In this matter, we see how AP fits into the scenario since the two main players are able to produce refined sugar through their factories and meet demand.

"But in the event where de-

mand increases against the volume produced, or if there is a glitch at the factories, then there is a need to issue an AP on refined sugar.

"It is only for a short period of time, maybe five to eight months, and can only be used once as part of the monitoring mechanism."

### 'MADE IN MALAYSIA'

The government had allocated RM20 million to promote local brands, said Saifuddin, a huge rise from RM3 million last year.

To support local products and ensure that they are available across the country, the ministry has introduced a "30 per cent local product" policy on local and international hypermarkets.

"There has yet to be a hypermarket with 30 per cent local products due to their in-house

requirements, but these companies have been supportive of local products.

"This (policy) benefits the 174 small- and medium-sized enterprises, a majority of whom are Bumiputera Muslims. I know some local brands like Kopi Hang Tuah and Sos Mudim, and these brands have achieved big sales in international hypermarkets."

Saifuddin said local companies could be successful as long as they adhered to the requirements set by the authorities.

"I want to focus on local products. No matter who makes it, it should be made well, pass the Health Ministry requirements and are priced affordably. And, if necessary, obtain halal status."

He also touched on the possibility of price hikes following the boycott campaign started by

Muslim non-governmental organisations.

"First, they said boycott non-Muslim products. Then they changed their stand to 'buy Muslim products first'."

On concerns by the Malaysian Employers Federation about the livelihood of employees working in non-Muslim companies, which could be affected by the boycott, Saifuddin said it was imperative that Malaysians focus on supporting local brands, instead of buying those produced by a certain race or religion.

"To say that prices of cooking oil, for instance, went down due to the boycott is inaccurate. This is because there are products that are sold cheaper prior to the campaign. At the end of the day, the choice is in the hands of consumers," he said.