

Selling your AP for food imports? Watch out, govt is tracking you online

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Saifuddin said the system tracks the movement of various imported goods under its watch which are brought in by AP holders. — Picture by Yusof Mat Isa

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 7 — The Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry is using a special online system to monitor and counter the practice of selling approved permits (AP) for importing foodstuffs under its purview.

Its minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail said the system tracks the movement of various imported goods under its watch, including sugar, flour and cooking oil, which are brought in by AP holders, *Berita Harian* reported today.

Saifuddin explained that through the recently created system, AP holders must key in the data of the goods' movement, such as whether they have already arrived at the port, or have already been sold to others such as factories or industrial producers.

By law, retailers are forbidden from directly buying the goods from AP holders.

"If the final recipient of the goods is not made clear, or their details are left unfilled by the AP holder, we will impound the goods," he told the Malay daily in an interview.

"At present, there are two AP holders whose goods we have detained, as we are investigating their final destination.

"They are currently at the port, and although not much in quantity, I am describing how our mechanism monitors potential abuse by AP holders," Saifuddin was quoted as saying.

The minister said the government views the sale of APs gravely because of the impact on consumers who will pay higher prices for goods.

He explained that a new link in the supply chain is created while the AP holders themselves reap large profits at the expense of the consumer.

On the suggestion by some to abolish the AP system altogether, Saifuddin said the government has to study the positive and negative impact of doing so, when too many parties can import certain goods.

"For example, its main weakness is in terms of protecting Malaysian farmers. We import things like chillies since the supply grown in Cameron Highlands is insufficient to meet demand.

"But when too many chillies are imported, the prices go down, which may lead to people preferring to buy the imported chillies rather than local ones," he was quoted as saying.

Saifuddin cited another example of mature coconuts during festive periods, when 27 million coconuts are usually needed to meet demands.

"If there is not enough, we import coconuts costing 80 sen from Indonesia, while coconuts grown in Bagan Datuk cost RM1.20,

"Using that as a reference for the domestic price under the AP system, if it were to be abolished, this could drive down prices to as low as 60 sen. What is to happen to the farmers in Bagan Datuk?" he posed.

