

## Price watch task force needed to ensure goods availability



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by AFIQ AZIZ/ pic by BLOOMBERG

CONSUMER associations recommended the government to establish a one-stop command centre which involves relevant stakeholders to guarantee stable distribution and price of essential items during the Movement Control Order (MCO).

Consumer Association of Subang and Shah Alam, Selangor president Datuk Prof Dr Jacob George said currently, there is no consolidated effort involving consumers to mitigate price escalation in the market.

George said lack of logistic resources has caused shortage in essential items.

"We have a ministry saying that items like fish, vegetables and others are sufficiently produced, but on the other hand, consumers still find the shelves empty.

"On top of that, we have found that prices are higher than before the MCO, but the ministry keep on assuring, saying that the products are sufficient and enforcers are on the ground.



4 "This is why I have asked for a price watch task force to be set up at the ministerial level and chaired by one of the senior ministers," George told *The Malaysian Reserve (TMR)*.

The Phase 1 of MCO started from March 18 and ended on March 31, before it was extended to its second phase to April 14, and subsequently until April 28 to curb the spread of Covid-19.

Last week, *Bernama* reported that the public had started to face difficulty in getting eggs in the market. The Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry (KPDNHEP) said this was due to delivery issues and a spike in demand.

It was also reported that hundreds of tonnes of vegetables were dumped by Cameron Highlands' farmers due to transportation problems.

George claimed that due to the distribution issues, retailers have started to mull over keeping 30% of their stocks to ensure goods are still available in the stores. This, however, could lead to price escalation.

"This proposed task force should go to the ground and work hand in hand with the consumerism enforcer and ministries. We hope there will be only one spokesperson to feed information to the people so that there will be no confusion at the ground," George said.

He added that the composition of the small task force should comprise those who have track record of many years in consumerism activity and services to ensure efficiency.

Meanwhile, the Muslim Consumers Association of Malaysia (PPIM) said although food and beverage (F&B) prices are still under control, the association is worried about price hikes in medical goods like face masks and hand sanitisers.

"Retailers and businesses know these are essential items at the current time and people would still buy it," PPIM chief activist Datuk Nadzim Johan told *TMR*.

"There must be coordination — one channel for people to get a certain answer on where to get items during the MCO.

"Apart from that, the coordination (from the task force) can also be a channel for non-profit organisations to directly channel their help according to the demand and needs as they have more consolidated information," Nadzim said.

Up to April 6, the KPDNHEP had conducted 15,959 inspections against retailers, wholesalers and manufacturers nationwide.

The ministry received 1,466 complaints regarding supply and prices of essential goods. Most of them were related to facemasks and hand sanitisers, with 65 notices issued to the traders.

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