

Darshini Kandasamy
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The Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry is no longer relying on consumers to help its monitoring officers to check prices of goods to update its daily price watch.

The decision was made as the ministry felt this would help prevent errors in price documentation as there would no longer be any confusion in differentiating items.

The Ministry's National Price Council Secretariat head, Rodin Mamat, told Malay Mail: "It was difficult. When we asked for the help of consumers to record prices, they got confused and we were worried they would have problems differentiating the specifications of various items," he said.

Take chicken for example. There are different types of chicken available, such as standard chicken and ayam super. The average consumer may not be able to tell the difference and might get the prices wrong.

Last April, the ministry hired 1,600 price monitoring officers nationwide on a one year contract. While it will no longer be relying on consumer assistance, Rodin said the ministry's price watch portal had a new look that could be accessed through the ministry's website or at smartconsumer.my.

There were also several changes introduced to the price watch programme, that took effect after the launch of the new portal three days ago.

Previously, price monitoring officers would have to return to the headquarters each day to submit the list of prices at the various hypermarkets, supermarkets and markets that staff at the ministry would upload onto the site.

Now, Rodin said, price monitoring officers would key in the prices themselves to save time. The same will be for hypermarkets.

Consumers can now select the items for which they want to know the price on the portal. For example, they can pick 10 of the 50 listed items, such as fish, chicken and others, and the system will indicate the prices," Rodin said, adding that in the past, consumers would have to go through the whole list to check the price of any item they wanted to buy.

He also said the portal also shows places that have all 50 items and those that stock fewer. He said public response to the programme, introduced last September, had been good. There was an average increase of 1,000 viewers to the website almost daily.

However, Rodin said, Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob issued a directive last Tuesday for the portal to be improved further and to be more user friendly.

"It is a bit slow. But the site will be continuously improved as we aim to make it simpler so that all the information can be accessed immediately, without having to click on so many buttons."

Last October, Malay Mail reported the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry had hired 2,000 unemployed degree holders to monitor prices and stocks of various essential items.

Info useful only if you shop in the afternoon

HERE is a tip for cheap grocery shopping – make sure you first check the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry's price watch portal for the latest daily price updates and comparisons before your shopping trip. But this can be done only after 12pm.

While the Malaysian norm is to do grocery shopping in the morning, those who postpone their trip to the afternoon will be able to get the day's prices of 50 listed essential goods, including meat, vegetables and fruits, at various supermarkets, hypermarkets and wet markets in the country.

The Ministry's National Price Council Secretariat head, Rodin Mamat, said: "Even though we update the portal daily, we are only able to put up all the prices at noon."

Sadly, we know most Malaysians do their shopping in the morning," he said.

Newlook Price Watch portal

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◆However, by next year, should we receive adequate allocation, we hope to change this by including real-time price updates,◆ Rodin added.</p><p align="justify">This way, consumers would be able to know the latest prices of goods as soon as supermarkets, hypermarkets and markets in the country open for business in the morning.</p><p align="justify">Rodin said the list of 50 items monitored daily, as well as the premises covered by the price watch, comprising hypermarkets, supermarket and wet markets, would remain unchanged.</p><p align="justify">Source: http://www.mmail.com.my/content/newlook-price-watch-portal</p>