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PETALING JAYA: If consumers are regarded as kings, then why should they need protection? It is simply because there are manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers who often take advantage of the consumers' weakness in exerting their right, said Datuk Dr Mohamed Ariff Abdul Kareem, former executive director of the Malaysian Institute of Economic Research (MIER). Speaking at the launch of the Consumer Research and Resource Centre (CRRC) here, he said the consumer could only be king if he operated in a group and not as an individual. He referred to the government's move to reduce workers' contribution to the Employees' Provident Fund with the aim of putting more cash in the pockets of consumers and encouraging them to spend. "However, if the money is not spent wisely it would be detrimental to the future of the consumers themselves," he pointed out. Dr Mohamed Ariff said the Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations (Fomca), which was affiliated to the CRRC, could play a pivotal role in educating consumers and assisting them to be "kings" by exerting their right. He urged the government to emulate Vietnam and Cambodia which had introduced a "Competitions Act" in order to curtail monopoly. He said it was important to encourage competition as it would ensure better and cheaper products for the consumer. On the proposed Goods & Services Tax, he said it was to enable the government to collect more taxes because the system worked such that the more consumers bought the more they paid, particularly the rich who bought luxury items. Items frequently used by the poor and low-income group were exempted from this tax, he added. - Bernama

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