

Sugar price drops as govt weighs soda tax

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PUTRAJAYA: The ceiling price for coarse granulated sugar and fine granulated sugar will be reduced by 10 sen per kg, as the government mulls a soda tax to promote a healthy lifestyle.

Announcing the new price - coarse granulated sugar at RM2.85 per kg and fine granulated sugar at RM2.95 per kg effective Sept 1 - Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Saifuddin Nasution Ismail said the price drop was due to the global reduction in the price of raw sugar, as well as the rising cost of living.

"This is also taking into consideration the rise in the cost of living in Malaysia, which is caused by the rise in costs of goods.

"Hopefully, this reduction will spark a multiplying effect that will reduce the price of food and drinks in the market," said Saifuddin at a



Sweet treats:

A worker rearranging soft drinks at a supermarket in Kuala Lumpur.
— Bernama

press conference after his ministry's monthly assembly here.

He said neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore had taken similar measures and that the price of sugar in Malaysia remained one of the lowest in South-East Asia.

But he also stressed that reduced sugar prices should not be seen as an encouragement by the government to increase one's sugar intake.

"In 2016, over 3.6 million Malay-

sians aged 18 and above were diabetic. This number will keep rising if we do not take measures to control sugar consumption," he said.

In Kuala Lumpur, Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the government was looking at introducing a soda tax to encourage healthy living and reduce sugar consumption, a cause of diabetes.

Responding to the price reduction, Prof Datuk Dr Anuar Zaini Md Zain, who is a National Diabetes

Institute board member, said price control on sugar has had little impact on the nation's diabetes statistics.

He was of the opinion that all food and beverages which have high sugar content should be taxed.

"This way, people will think twice about consuming products that may be dangerous to health," he said.

Galen Centre for Health and Social Policy chief executive officer Azrul Mohd Khalib said reducing sugar price and introducing a soda tax would send a contradictory message to the public.

Advising the government to reconsider the price drop, he said the sugar price should have remained as it is since Malaysia already enjoys cheap sugar.

He added that a soda tax would encourage consumers to switch to other sugar-sweetened beverage such as teh tarik and kopi susu.

Azul proposed that the tax be applied to manufacturers and not at the point of retail.