

Traders can land in hot water

Restaurant operators may be jailed for overcharging

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PETALING JAYA: Restaurant operators who overcharge customers ordering water can be punished under the Price Control and Anti-Profitteering Act 2011.

The warning came from none other than Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, who described charging RM1.50 for a glass of water as "too high".

"Unhappy consumers should report to us and I will send my officers to issue a show-cause notice (to the restaurant operator) which must be answered within seven days," he told *The Star* in response to the newspaper's front-page report on the issue yesterday.

It was reported that the price of plain water at eateries in the Klang Valley was higher than it should be, with restaurants and cafes charging between 80 sen and RM1.50 for a glass of plain water.

Ismail Sabri said the Act could be imposed against the operators despite the price of water not being a controlled item.

According to Section 18 of the Act, those found guilty of profiteering can be fined up to RM100,000, jailed three years, or both.

The penalty for a second or subsequent offence is a fine of up to RM250,000, five years' jail or both.

If a corporate body is found guilty, it can be fined up to RM500,000 for the first offence and up to RM1mil for subsequent offences.

Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia (Awer) president

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— DATUK SERI ISMAIL SABRI YAAKOB

S. Piarapakaran said the many brands of distilled water available in the market were "all gimmicks".

He said it was safe for consumers to drink tap water in Malaysia as long as it was clean, clear and odour-free.

"Distilled water is produced by boiling water to make vapour and condensing it again to minimise the mineral content and purify it.

"As human beings, we need the minerals found in water. We do not need to consume distilled water," he said, pointing out that distilled water was used in batteries and laboratory experiments.

He said those who were really worried about tap water quality could purchase a 50 micron filter and activated carbon (to remove odour) which cost less than RM70.

Piarapakaran likened charging consumers excessively for water to "daylight robbery".

Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Mary Cardosa said what people should really be worried about in drinking water was germ contamination and heavy metal poisoning.

"If the water has been properly processed, then it should be fine for consumption," she said.