

# Subsidy removal sparks **sugar rush**

## Traders make last-minute grab before price increase

BAGS of sugar were “flying” off the shelves in supermarkets and shops soon after it was announced that subsidy on the item would be abolished.

The directive takes effect today.

In George Town, Sunshine Square Bayan Baru supermarket manager Loo Toon Hean said 188 packets of 500gm sugar were sold within an hour of the announcement.

“Most of the buyers I recognised as hawkers and coffee shop operators, who snapped up as many packets as they could,” said Loo.

He had not expected such a last-minute rush for sugar.

“We are prepared as we have a few thousand packets of sugar in stock,” he said when contacted.

Fomca secretary-general Datuk Paul Selvaraj (*pic*) said they supported doing away with sugar subsidies but they had hoped it would be done in a gradual manner.

“Our concern is the multiplier effect this will cause on the prices of food because sugar is used in many items,” he said.

Consumers Association of Penang



(CAP) president S.M. Mohamed Idris said the move was long overdue.

“The money saved by the Government from the subsidies can be channelled to help the poor.”

National Kidney Foundation chairman Datuk Dr Zaki Morad lauded the subsidy removal, saying that diabetes was the most

common cause of end-stage kidney failure.

Almost 60% of patients on dialysis were diabetics, he said.

“We can save on a lot of money on complications that could arise if we control diabetes better,” he said, adding that incentives for healthy lifestyle should also be promoted.

Dr Zaki also said the provision of peritoneal dialysis kits to more than 1,000 end-stage kidney failure patients would reduce the overall cost of care compared with the use of haemodialysis.

The use of peritoneal dialysis, which patients could carry out at home on their own, costs less than haemodialysis as there was no need to build a dialysis centre besides requiring fewer nurses to supervise,

he explained.

Dr Zaki said that about 90% of patients were on haemodialysis while the rest were on peritoneal dialysis.

The allocation would address the imbalance, he said.

Currently, there were about 28,000 patients on haemodialysis.

Malaysian Medical Association president Datuk Dr N.K.S. Tharmaseelan said the sugar subsidy removal was a bold and wise move as the number of diabetics was on the increase.

He also said that more hospitals should be built to address overcrowding and cater to the growing number of medical graduates.

“Otherwise, many doctors will be jobless,” he said.

On 1Malaysia Clinics, he said more should be built in rural areas so that people need not travel far to a health facility.

National Cancer Institute president Dr S. Saunthari said the institute was delighted with the free breast prosthesis and bras for breast cancer patients.

“It acknowledges breast cancer rehabilitation as an integral part of holistic cancer treatment,” she said.



## BUDGET 2014

### Key points

- > **Sugar subsidy** of 34 sen per kilo **removed**
- > **RM66mil** for purchase of **equipment** and **construction** of additional blocks in **Hospital Queen Elizabeth**
- > Another **50 1Malaysia clinics** to be set up next year
- > **Hospitals** in **Rompin** and **Tampin** as well as **National Cancer Institute** to be operational early next year
- > **6,800** more **nurses** to be **hired** with an allocation of **RM150mil**
- > **RM3.3bil** allocation for purchase of medicine and medical equipment, including expanding the cardiothoracic services in Ipoh, Kuala Terengganu, Kuantan and Kuching hospitals
- > **Free** home-based peritoneal **dialysis kit** costing **RM19,000** per unit for about **1,000** end-stage kidney failure patients
- > **RM22.1bil** allocation for the **health sector** under operating and development expenditure