

Source: THIS DAY

Date: 21-Apr-2004

Topic: 08

Ref No: 6376



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ID: 03075343-01

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Controversial report on food prices expected soon

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JOHANNESBURG — The government's food price monitoring committee will meet agriculture department officials on Friday to discuss the release of its long-awaited final report, the chairperson Johan Kirsten said yesterday.

Kirsten said the ministry had had the report since January.

He said some findings might be considered controversial. Though he denied that the government would try to suppress parts of the report, he was unable to confirm if it would be released in its entirety.

The eight-member committee was set up early last year to protect the public against unfair price hikes after the rampant food-price inflation in 2002. Its task was to monitor 26 basic

food commodities and to monitor prices, probe sharp or unjustified price hikes and determine the competitiveness of production operations.

Preliminary findings released in September were inconclusive, but the final report contains recommendations to the government on productivity improvements, market inefficiencies and distortions.

Abbey Makoe, spokesperson for the land and agriculture minister Thoko Didiza, said the minister's office had not delayed the release of the report.

"This is a sensitive issue that must be treated with seriousness."

It would be tabled before parliament "as a matter of urgency".

The report is expected to be made public next month.