

Putrajaya urges mask makers to raise output for Wuhan virus

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BY RADZI RAZAK



Boxes of face masks are seen at a Pharmhouse Pharmacy outlet in Setia Alam January 28,2020. — Picture by Miera Zulyana

PUTRAJAYA, Feb 7 — Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail said the government has asked surgical mask manufacturers to increase their production to support efforts against the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV).

He said that the manufacturers have agreed and will raise their output to potentially 400,000 masks a day to supplement the government's existing stockpiles.

"If they can increase production the government is willing to buy," he said at a joint press conference with Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng at the Finance Ministry today.

The minister said most manufacturers were not yet back to full capacity due to the recent Chinese New Year break.

"If we can get one million masks in two weeks, we won't have any problems in demands," he said.

Malaysia has fewer than 10 mask manufacturers and most are geared towards export.

The Malaysian government did not impose a ban on surgical mask exports following the outbreak, unlike some countries.

Instead, the government acknowledged that there was a global shortage and asked manufacturers to produce more to meet the demand.

Malaysia currently imports surgical masks from China, Europe, the US and Singapore.

Lim said masks purchased for the government will be distributed according to the Health Ministry's recommendations.

"We will put stocks at all the necessary places," he said.

