

## Ministry to work with manufacturers to meet face mask demand

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by NUR HAZIQAH A MALEK / pic by ARIF KARTONO

THE Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs is working with face mask suppliers to meet the rising demand, as the population seeks preventive measures against the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak.

Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail (*picture*) said his officials are in discussion with the suppliers and manufacturers to deal with the shortage of face masks.

“Based on the report that we received from manufacturers, the current face mask supply is meant to meet the demand prior to the outbreak and thus is insufficient to meet the increasing demand, and the ministry will request for more.

“Due to the Chinese New Year break, manufacturers’ operations were also slower than usual as of late,” he said at the Tesco “Buy Malaysian Product” campaign in Kajang, Selangor, yesterday.

He added that there were reports of panic purchases, resulting in lower availability on store shelves.

“There has been an increase of panic purchases by the public, notably in Johor, on these preventive products.

“I would like to assure that the supply of both products should be enough to prevent any more panic purchases among the people, and I hope the public will stay calm,” Saifuddin Nasution said.

The ministry recently said face masks are price-controlled items following news of price hikes, as well as face masks and hand sanitiser selling out at sundry shops, pharmacies and 24-hour convenience stores in Johor and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

Mask hoarding has been reported in the US, where some pharmacies have apparently sold out entirely, and some Amazon sellers say deliveries will be delayed for weeks.

Meanwhile, Saifuddin Nasution, who is also PKR secretary general, said the ongoing rift in PKR will not jeopardise party president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's chances of becoming prime minister (PM) — a post to be decided by Pakatan Harapan.

"Back then (before the 14th General Election), Anwar was still in prison and did not even contest, and it was discussed with PM Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself and he agreed that Anwar will be the next PM.

"Next, who has the majority in Parliament? The most important thing in determining his position is the government's consensus, as well as the MPs. It is up to them and not the party," Saifuddin Nasution said.

The friction between Anwar and PKR deputy president Datuk Seri Mohamed Azmin Ali appears to be increasing after Saifuddin Nasution issued a show-cause letter and letter of demand to PKR VP Zuraida Kamaruddin, seen as an ally of Azmin.

The letters were issued for alleged disciplinary misconduct, following Zuraida's remarks against top party leaders during a dinner last month.

Saifuddin Nasution said he will leave it to the party's Disciplinary Bureau to follow up with the recent rallies held to defend Zuraida.

"I have no problem with the threats by any party members to quit if she is punished over her speeches last month.

"Part of my work as secretary general is to see how many applications there are to join the party, and every week prior to the political bureau meeting, I see 10,000 applications and we have only 30,000 to go to one million," he said.

Persatuan Penggerak Muafakat Nasional Pulau Pinang chairperson Shahrudin Mohd Shariff was previously reported as saying 10,000 grassroots members would leave the party with Zuraida if she was dismissed.