

Run on supermarts

➤ Spreading of fake news online said to have caused public to stock up on essential items

BY THE SUN TEAM
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PETALING JAYA: Malaysians yesterday headed to supermarkets and grocery stores in droves to stock up on essential items in the first sign of major panic buying in the country since the Covid-19 outbreak.

Viral fake news purportedly from the Health Ministry "advising" Malaysians to stock up due to an imminent lockdown was believed to have contributed to the buying frenzy.

Although it was a weekday, grocery stores and supermarkets saw an unusual increase of customers by between five and ten-fold throughout the day.

theSun surveyed several stores and found a continuous stream of shoppers making their way to the stores and leaving with shopping carts full of groceries. They said they were stocking up for between two weeks and a month.

The top five targeted items by shoppers were toilet paper, canned food, biscuits, instant noodles and rice. While staff were seen replenishing most of the shelves, several remained empty.

At Star Grocers in Sea Park, several staff said the sudden increase of customers began on Sunday and rose by several fold yesterday.

Businessman Alfred Lim, 50, was among those seen lining up at the long queue of

the supermarket.

"We want to ensure we have enough food stored in case there is a lockdown," he said.

While hundreds of others were grabbing essential food items, several who came over to pick up their usual food items were taken aback by the crowd.

"I just came to buy one item but on seeing the long queue, I decided to leave. I'm not going to bother queuing up like this. I feel the government should take this matter seriously," said 66-year-old retiree Sandara Segaran.

It was no different at the Giant supermarket in Jalan SS6/3, Kelana Jaya, where toilet paper appeared to be flying off the shelves.

"We are worried about the quarantine, the lockdown and I have been preparing for it over the past two days by buying enough food and other household items," said Laila Wahi.

Staff were kept busy catering to the higher number of customers.

"It has been like this since Saturday and the numbers are growing," said a staff at the supermarket.

"We rarely see things running out this fast. We are out of eggs. We manage to replenish some items but are out of stock on others. Fortunately, our restocking takes place daily and I believe there will be enough every day."

A duty manager at Tesco said the spike in the number of shoppers was unexpected.

"Usually, not more than 2,000 people come to buy their groceries on weekdays, but about 3,000 people are shopping here at Tesco Paradigm now," the staff said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the public need not resort to panic buying as there is enough food for everyone.

COVID-19 UPDATE
 AS AT 6.22PM MARCH 16

No. of new cases	Accumulative total
125	553

He said the government would ensure there is sufficient supply of essential food items, adding that corresponding instructions have been given to the Domestic Trade and Consumers Affairs Ministry.

"We are monitoring the situation on the ground closely and the Agriculture Ministry is also working with producers to ensure supply needs are met," he told the media after chairing a National Economic Council meeting to deal with the Covid-19 outbreak.

"All (outlets) selling essential food items to the public will remain open."

Earlier, consumer groups urged the government to assure the public that the situation is under control.

Federation of Malaysian Consumers Association deputy president Mohd Yusof Abdul Rahman said the buying frenzy was mainly due to false news.

"They may be worried because their movements will be restricted."

"The government, specifically the Health Ministry, should address this issue to assure the public to remain clam," he said.

"The public must also verify news before sharing it with others. We are currently monitoring the situation."

"We will alert the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry on what is lacking," he said.