

Ministry mulls banning export of face masks to ensure ample supply for S'wak

BY JOASH KONG ON MARCH 14, 2020, SATURDAY AT 4:49 PM



Nanta (centre) speaking at the press conference. Accompanying him are Dr Sim (left) and Wee. Photo by Muhammad Rais Sanusi.

KUCHING: The Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs is looking into the possibility of banning the export of locally-manufactured face masks.

Its minister Datuk Alexander Nanta Linggi said that this was based on the rising demand of face masks in the country due to the recent announcements concerning the number of positive Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) cases and to ensure that there would be adequate supply.

"We are looking at all possibilities right now but we will do it (the ban) if there is a serious shortage in the country.

"Under normal circumstances, we do export face masks to other countries but because the whole world is demanding the same thing, this affects the supply and demand. We are asking our local manufacturers to manufacture more but we will look into an export ban because we need face masks ourselves," Nanta said.

He made this call in a press conference after conducting a walkabout at a supermarket at The Spring Shopping Mall earlier today.

He also urged retailers not to sell face masks in bulk to a sole customer as that could affect the supply of face masks.

"The government is taking proactive measures in ensuring that there will be an adequate supply of face masks and hand sanitisers. Thus, I urge retailers not to sell these items in bulk to just one or two customers because that is hoarding and will deprive other people from access to those items.

"The ministry's enforcement officers will also be monitoring the situation to ensure that nobody is taking advantage or trying to make a profit from this situation so that the public's protection is ensured," Nanta said.

He also urged members of the public to be considerate when purchasing face masks and to buy based on their needs instead of "panic buying".

"Yesterday, there was viral footage on social media of people 'panic buying' at a supermarket. Actually there was a sale going on, not panic buying. So we hope that the public will not start panic buying.

"I believe that if we make our purchases considerately, there will be ample supply. Of course, my ministry will be looking at the situation to ensure that there will be adequate supply to go around," Nanta said.

Also present were Local Government and Housing Minister Dato Sri Dr Sim Kui Hian and Kuching South mayor Datuk Wee Hong Seng.