

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

MINISTRY TO PREVENT PANIC BUYING IN JOHOR

Inspections carried out to ensure adequate supply of essential goods, says state director

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THE Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry has started conducting checks in Johor Baru, Iskandar Puteri, Pasir Gudang and Kulai since Saturday to prevent panic buying by Singaporeans.

State ministry director Mohd Hairul Anuar Bohro said 604 premises had been inspected. The two-day operation involved 60 enforcement officers.

"The inspections are carried out to ensure essential goods, such as food and other basic items, are adequate for local consumers.

"The ministry will also make sure that there is no attempt to conceal controlled goods by retailers and that there is no profiteering," said Hairul.

On the supply of controlled goods, including sugar, cooking oil and flour, at wholesale and retail levels, the ministry said based on data received from wholesalers, there was adequate stock for consumers in Johor.

A check at several retail outlets in the state confirmed the ministry's finding as there was no indication of a panic buying spree by Singaporeans here, despite reports of such incidents in the republic.

Employees of several retail outlets at a mall popular among Singaporeans here told the *New Straits Times* that there was no significant change in the shopping patterns of Singaporeans.

"Everything seems to be normal.

"I have not seen them buying any particular item in large quantities," said an employee.

He said there had been no significant increase in the number of Singaporeans coming to the outlet.

"They usually come here on weekends, from Friday to Sunday. For some reason, the most popular items among Singaporeans are soaps and cleaning items," he said.

A check at the aisles also showed that they were well-stocked with essential items, like rice, instant noodles, drinking water and toilet rolls and paper towels.

An employee of a pharmacy at the mall said there was no visible change in the number of Singaporeans shopping at the outlet.

"We still get Singaporeans coming here to shop, but there is no sharp rise in the number. Everything is as usual."

It was reported that some Singaporeans went on a supermarket shopping frenzy in the republic after the government there raised the alert level for the novel coronavirus outbreak to "Orange" on Friday.

According to Singapore's Disease Outbreak Response System Condition, an Orange warning level, its second highest, indicates the disease is "severe and spread easily from person to person". But, the disease has not spread widely in Singapore and is being contained.

On the sale of face masks, the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry said its state office in Johor was conducting investigations after receiving 65 complaints.

"So far, 187 inspections have been carried out on those selling and supplying face masks.

"Two outlets have been identified for selling the masks above the controlled price.

"These two premises have been slapped with a RM500 compound and a RM10,000 compound."