

*The* **Star**

## 'Stable sugar supply for festivities'

By KHOO GEK SAN

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PETALING JAYA: Measures have been taken to guarantee a stable sugar supply during the upcoming festive season, says Deputy Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Minister Fuziah Salleh.

She said the ministry has issued supply control directives to MSM Malaysia Holdings Bhd (MSM) and Central Sugars Refinery Sdn Bhd (CSR) to safeguard consumer interests.

She said MSM produces at least 24,000 tonnes a month, whereas CSR contributes at least 18,000 tonnes a month.

"The supply of 42,000 tonnes is indeed sufficient, including for the festive season," she said when contacted.

She said the companies must promptly submit daily reports to address potential shortage issues.

"This is the amount they must supply. And they have to report daily," she said.

In response to concerns about purported shortages of white sugar in some regions, she assured that such issues are rare – usually stemming from issues with the distribution system which can usually be resolved in a day or two.

According to the Minister, enforcement authorities have been instructed to respond swiftly to those shortages to continue to safeguard consumer interests.

"Every complaint about a shortage of white sugar that comes in will be dealt with immediately by the enforcement authorities," she added.

The upcoming Chinese New Year in February and the fasting month in March are expected to lead to a doubling in demand for white sugar.

An interview with MSM group chief executive officer Syed Feizal Syed Mohammad revealed that Malaysia's sugar supply remains stable.

"We have not observed any severe shortages. Two months before any festive season, whether Chinese New Year or Hari Raya, there will be a surge in customer purchasing.

"So we are prepared for that, and it's quite normal. In fact, they have already started Chinese New Year shopping. So there is a bit of a surge in volume. But our production is OK, and the Johor plant is ramping up production too. We have a lot of capacity headroom in Johor now," he said.

However, he acknowledged a slight scarcity of sugar in Johor, which he attributed to the influx of Singaporeans crossing the border for grocery shopping.

The pricing disparity between the neighbouring countries, with sugar costing approximately RM6.50 per kg in Singapore compared with less than RM3 here, has increased Singaporean visitors' purchases.

"We cannot stop them, and we cannot blame them. So that's why we are experiencing a shortage in Johor," he said.

Nevertheless, he said the presence of MSM Group's plant in Johor ensures that any shortfall can be met and fulfilled.

Contrary to the situation in Johor, no reported shortages have been observed in Sabah and Sarawak.

"It's quite stable," he said, adding that deliveries are being made to ensure a consistent supply of sugar in the region.

In a written reply, CSR said that there are no shortages of sugar supply at CSR.

Production is running as usual and is meeting the requirements set by the ministry.

“Despite the commercial pressures, the sugar industry remains steadfast in its commitment to Malaysia’s national food security.

“The industry is dedicated to ensuring that sugar production and supplies are sufficient, in line with the Ministry’s requirements,” it said.

Sugar is a controlled item under the Control of Supplies Act 1961.

Coarse white sugar is sold at RM2.85 per kg, while refined white sugar costs RM2.95 per kg.

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