

Making Sure Logistics Chain Continues Moving

KUALA LUMPUR : The easy availability of face masks in Malaysia at a reasonable price during the most critical moments did not happen by chance. It was the result of a decisive move to ensure supply arrived here on time. In an interview to mark his impending 100 days in office this Thursday, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong said the matter was not a result of market forces at play. Owing to the sudden high global demand for face masks, initial supply in Malaysia was limited, leading to prices spiralling as high as RM2.50 to RM3 apiece.

“Scammers also seized the chance to cheat anxious consumers We needed to act quickly. The Transport Ministry suggested the use of grounded aircraft – such as MASkargo – to bring in the masks. This was the fastest way because many ships were not sailing.

“Credit goes to Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin for the brave decision to order a huge amount of face masks from China, up to 50 million pieces. “This flooded the market and reduced the tension during a critical juncture, ” Dr Wee said, adding that subsequent supply availability also allowed the government to set the ceiling price for the much sought-after item. A further decision by the government to waive the 20% import duty and 10% sales tax brought prices down further.

On March 20, the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry included face masks under the Price Control and Anti-Profiteering (Determination of Maximum Price) Order 2020 while at the same time banning the export of face masks.

Looking back, Dr Wee said he had to hit the ground running although his initial plan after his swearing-in on March 10 was to get to know the more than 20 agencies under this ministry. Malaysia imposed the movement control order (MCO) on March 18, barely three weeks after the swearing-in of Muhyiddin on March 1 as Prime Minister and subsequently his Cabinet ministers, taking over from Pakatan Harapan. Eight days into the job, even before Dr Wee could familiarise himself with the 20-odd agencies in the ministry, the government imposed the MCO.

“Hundreds of confirmed Covid-19 cases were reported every day. Everyone was fearful. Borders were closed while road use was restricted. “But we still had to get essential goods moving. For example, Singapore made a request to ensure food and other supplies continued to reach them, ” he said, adding that sorting out the logistical arrangements for the movement of cargo took a huge chunk of his attention in the early days.

“To ensure the logistics chain was not interrupted, we had to ensure all stakeholders played their part, to work as normal, even as they faced Covid-

19. “We had to convince them, to assure them of safety. At that point, some said the virus was airborne and there were all kinds of views. We had to quickly get all stakeholders, and that was a huge challenge. “The Transport Ministry met up with them nearly every day. We told them, under whatever circumstances let’s work hard to make sure essential goods reached the people.

“At a time when the country was facing a severe challenge, I am thankful the spirit of working together united us, because all of us know that to prevail against this unseen enemy, failure is not an option, ” he said.

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