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Malaysia to play it safe

Imported Japanese food to be closely monitored

PUTRAJAYA: Close monitoring will be carried out on food items imported from Japan to ensure their safety, says acting Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Minister Datuk Armizan Mohd Ali.

The monitoring was necessary as Malaysia's food imports, including from Japan, were substantial, he said.

"We will monitor the development. We have also taken note of the advisory issued by the Health Ministry," he told a press conference yesterday.

Armizan said the public would be notified of any developments or decisions by the government on the matter.

The Health Ministry (MOH) had said that it would impose a Level 4 (surveillance) inspection on high-risk food products imported from Japan.

Its secretary-general Datuk Dr Muhammad Radzi Abu Hassan said the inspections, which would be for radioactive content, would be done at international entry points.

Japan had announced that it would start releasing more than one million metric tonnes of treated water from the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

In 2011, a 9.0-magnitude earthquake triggered a tsunami that hit three reactors at the nuclear power plant, located about 250km north of Tokyo.

The tragedy was the second-worst nuclear accident after the Ukraine's Chernobyl disaster in 1986.

Yesterday, MOH special adviser Kelvin Yii said safety measures to screen radioactive elements in food imported from Japan would be similar to those done in 2011.

He assured Malaysians that the ministry and other related authorities, including the Agriculture and Food Security Ministry, are taking stringent measures to ensure the safety of food products from Japan.

"Food safety is not something that will be compromised. Through MOH, 'high-risk' food imports from Japan will be subject to Level 4 (surveillance) examination to screen for radioactive elements as the island nation moves to release water from its troubled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant," he said.

This was something that MOH, through the ministry's Food Safety and Quality Division, had done to monitor the risks, Yii added in a statement.

For instance, he said there was monitoring of Japanese food imports from May 2011 to April 2012 following the Fukushima nuclear plant meltdown.

Yii also said samples were collected and analysed to ensure adherence to the regulatory limits under Regulation 37 of the Food Regulations 1985.

"I understand some of the anxieties and even concerns raised by the public. That why, in order to address this concern, the ministry is committed to constantly monitoring national entry points and local markets to ensure food safety is guaranteed," he added.

As such, he said the ministries involved including MOH, were on high alert to ensure food supplied to Malaysia was safe for consumption.

On Wednesday, Deputy Agriculture and Food Security Minister Chan Foong H said in a statement that there is currently no live marine fish imported from Japan, citing the Fisheries Department.

"For any non-live fishery products from Japan, the ministry is working closely with the Health Ministry and other relevant authorities such as the Quarantine and Inspection Services Malaysia (MAQIS) at the Malaysia Fisheries Development Authority (LKIM) to monitor food safety issues, including checks on health certifications and radiation during post-import," he said.

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Business as usual: Buyers attending an auction at Numanouchi fish port in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture. — Bloomberg