

MEF welcomes ease to Phase 1 restrictions and opening up of national economy

PETALING JAYA: Employers in Phase 1 of the National Recovery Plan (NRP) – especially micro enterprises and SMEs in the non-essential sectors – eagerly look forward to the easing of restrictions on social and business activities, as indicated by newly-appointed Senior Minister for Security YB Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein recently.

MEF President Dato' Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman J.P. thanked the YB Senior Minister for having empathy and giving due consideration to the acute stress levels of the *rakyat* in the Klang Valley where the highest concentration of economic activities is located.

“Having both mental and physical health is important because this is essential for human beings,” he said.

“But more importantly are the SMEs that are today classified as non-essential.

“Yes, these SMEs may be non-essential to the government but they are very essential to the businesses and to the livelihoods of the employees and their families.

“It has been almost four months of lockdown for many of these SMEs and this has devastated the retail industry.

“The barbers, locksmiths, car wash, saloons, gift shops are among those who still continue to suffer.

“We appreciate the ease of restrictions for Phase 2 regions, but the impact on businesses and livelihoods in KL and Selangor is huge especially for the non-essential sectors.

“The economic stress has become far greater than the physical stress because it can kill the business and all those involved in it.”

Dato' Dr Syed Hussain also urged the authorities to be reasonable in formulating plans to contain the spread of Covid-19 infection.

“If the plan to shut down the non-essential sectors was to reduce the spread of infections, then it should be worth all the effort,” he said.

“However, despite the prolonged lockdowns it is evidently clear that the number of those infected have kept increasing.

“This must lead to some conclusion that the lockdowns are not the answer.

“We must quickly change strategy to ease the pain of these business people and should not delay any further to say that this is being studied.

“The businesses don’t operate in that way as they need to earn income to survive.”

On behalf of the micro enterprises and SMEs, the MEF President appealed to YB Datuk Seri Hishammuddin to provide the necessary assistance to open up the economy.

“MEF is all for opening of the economy and we must stop using phases to decide on the economy but instead to zoom in, isolate and treat those in the red zones” he said.

“The authorities should adopt a combined strategy of rapid vaccination and to open up business with strict SOPs immediately.

“The employers are committed to implement and abide by all the necessary SOPs and MEF even supports tougher action against recalcitrant employers.

“But we must first remain alive and we believe YB Datuk Seri Hishammuddin understands our request and would soon allow us to operate.”

On the way forward, Dato’ Dr Syed Hussain said there was no point encouraging vaccinations but the employers and employees are suffering economically.

“The single strategy of mass vaccination prior to opening the economy has not worked,” he said.

“Let’s move towards a combined strategy so more people can have less stress.”

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