

Memo by Peoples Health Forum for Implementation of additional measures which have to be taken in order to curb the COVID-19 outbreak.

People's Health Forum
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To
YAB Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin
Prime Minister of Malaysia
Putrajaya

Dear Prime Minister,

RE : Implementation of additional measures which have to be taken in order to curb the COVID-19 outbreak

We, the signatories of the letter would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation on the ongoing efforts by the Ministry of Health (MOH) personnel to combat the outbreak of COVID-19. MOH has played a pivotal role in the containment of COVID-19 among Malaysians by identifying the cases, tracing and isolating the contacts of those who are infected with the virus and then treating them.

We, the civil society groups, academics, health activists and medical practitioners have been closely following the development of the COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia and at international level. Thus, we would like to suggest a few additional measures, which have to be implemented in order to further strengthen our country's response to control this serious public health threat. Some of the additional measures are:

1. Isolation of COVID-19 contact cases
We welcome the Prime Minister's announcement on 11/3/2020 pertaining to the establishment of the COVID-19 Fund managed by the country's National Disaster Management Agency to help the COVID-19 patients and those who have had close contact with these patients. We hope that these efforts could be further strengthened by:
 - a) Establishing a joint committee with the Health Department, Local Council, National Disaster Management Agency and the Welfare Department in every town and at district level to trace those who have had been in contact with COVID-19 patients (through phone calls), identify their needs and send essentials such as food, their regular medications, and other essentials for those families who may

have not been able to carry out these tasks because their family members are infected with the virus.

- b) The opening of temporary boarding facilities to accommodate the contacts of COVID-19 patients who may live in a crowded environment such as low cost flats where effective isolation could not be done because of limited space and toilets/ bathrooms have to be shared. The sports center and local college hostels could be temporarily used to accommodate these contacts who may not be able to isolate themselves in their houses. This is important because it can prevent the transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

2. The Restricted Movement Order

We support the government's announcement on the Restriction of Movement Order that is effective from March 18th to March 31st 2020. At this stage, this is a very important measure to curb the outbreak of COVID-19 among people from all walks of life. If this measure is not implemented strictly, the transmission of COVID-19 will burden the public health system. Resources and manpower will be channeled to combat the outbreak and this will disrupt the ongoing treatment for patients with cancer, HIV and other chronic illnesses.

In conjunction with YAB's announcement on the Restricted Movement Order dated March 16th 2020, we would like to highlight some grey areas that need to be addressed for the welfare of the rakyat:

- a) The daily wage earners, especially women workers working in the service sectors such as restaurants and coffee shops are paid on a daily basis and if these premises are closed, they will not be paid any compensation. Many of them earn a meager income and will face difficulties in providing the necessities of their children in the coming two weeks.
- b) We also need to consider the situation of factory workers who are paid on monthly basis, those who are working in goods and retails shops and other premises. These groups will be given leave by their employers due to this order and their state of income is very unclear and therefore needs to be clarified. Are they given paid leave or non-paid leave? How about the employers who are facing cash flow issues – no business activity but will have to pay fixed costs such as rental and salary?
- c) Many debtors who have mortgages and loans will face difficulties in paying their monthly installments for March and the coming month due to the losses / decrease in their incomes. Their situation will need to be taken into account and measures should be taken to alleviate their concerns.

Our suggestions for the above mentioned issues:

- Rationed food for families who are unable to buy their monthly house provisions due to loss of income. A committee at the district level should be established with the involvement of the Social Welfare Department and NGOs working on welfare issues in the district to identify families, which are facing these problems. An adequate allocation has to be channeled to the Social Welfare Department to carry out this programme.
- Employers with businesses making annual net revenue of RM300,000 and above should be ordered to pay full salaries for the period of 'restriction of movement order'. On the other hand, business owners with smaller net margin profits should be given some flexibilities to pay half month salaries for this period. SME banks or other similar monetary institutions should provide a special fund, which could be lent to those business owners who are facing cash flow problems so that they are able to pay their employees' salaries. This loan should have low interest rates.
- All the banks should be ordered not to impose any penalties to those who are unable to pay their monthly installments for these two months. (The loan/ mortgage repayment period should be extended for the next 2 months.)

The above-mentioned recommendations would represent a critical alleviation for those who are in pressing or dire situations. Besides that, they would also generate the aggregate demand in the domestic market, which will eventually lower the probability of recession/ economy crisis.

3. Managing the Foreign Workers

There are about 2 million foreign workers and another 4 million or more undocumented workers. Currently, many of them have to fork out a hefty sum of money for their diagnosis and treatment in public hospitals and clinics. Therefore, many are reluctant to visit MOH clinics and hospitals. The letter from the MOH's Treasury Secretary Department dated 29/1/2020 has stated that investigative diagnosis and treatment will be free for patients suspected of having COVID-19. However, this letter did not state if the investigative diagnosis and treatment is free of charge for patients suspected of having COVID-19 who then are diagnosed as free of COVID-19. The MOH letter stated that 'patients who do not show any symptoms will be charged an outpatient rate amounting to RM40 and other incidental charges where applicable.' Many foreign workers will continue to be reluctant to visit public hospitals if they have to incur high charges for treatment of other conditions (false COVID-19 cases). This will undermine our country's efforts to curb the transmission among Malaysians. We recommend for a deferral on the implementation of Treatment Fees for Foreign Workers (2014) for the next 6 months. It will helpful for now if the treatment fees for the foreign workers is reduced to the same treatment fees for Malaysia and this information should be disseminated effectively among the foreign workers.

Besides that, the government will have look into the issues of detention, arrest and filing of charges against those who are classified as undocumented foreign workers (UFC) / illegal immigrants (IL). Many of them may have fears of deportation and thus avoid coming to government institutions. Those who are COVID-19 positive will not reveal the names and their addresses of their close contacts who may be susceptible to the virus due to fear of deportation, arrest and detention. Thus, due to the staggering number of UFCs and ILs (approximately 4 million), their fear and reluctance to cooperate will undermine our efforts to curb this outbreak.

Our suggestion: Declare/ Announce a 6 months moratorium on ULCs and ILs. The government should be able to guarantee that ULCs and ILs would not be arrested, charged or deported to their origin countries for not having legal/ legitimate travel documents for a particular period of time.

Additional suggestions: To establish a joint committee with foreign worker communities in order to facilitate MOH's efforts in identifying and tracing the contact cases of COVID-19 among these communities. This joint committee should also be responsible in disseminating the information pertaining to health services and COVID-19 among the foreign workers. The government should provide accommodation / hostels to place these identified contacts of COVID-19.

4. The safety of MOH personnel

Malaysians are very grateful to all the doctors, nurses, paramedics and hospitals auxiliary workers who are on the front lines dealing with identified COVID-19 patients or those who are suspected of having COVID-19.

Our recommendations:

- Ensure they are provided with sufficient personnel protective equipment such as surgical masks, visors, protective clothes (surgical gowns) and gloves.
- Have regular discussions or counseling sessions with the medical workers so they have an avenue to channel their distress and together devise ways on how to overcome their distress and other identified issues pertaining to work.

Our recommendations in this letter will require coordinated efforts with other agencies and ministries. Thus, it is very vital to establish a National Committee that comprises of MOH, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Communications and Multimedia, National Disaster Management Agency, Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Housing and Local Government. This National Committee should be chaired by your good self so that immediate responses pertaining to the management of the COVID-19 outbreak could be taken. We also hope that adequate allocation is provided to MOH and other relevant ministries, which are involved in the implementation of all programmes aimed at curbing the COVID-19 outbreak.

Thank you.

Additional Measures which need to be Implemented to Curb Covid-19 Outbreak

Individuals and Groups that have endorsed the memorandum are as below:

CSO:

1. Agora Society
2. Aliran
3. All Women's Action Society (AWAM)
4. Arts-ED Penang
5. Bersih 2.0
6. Beyond Borders Malaysia
7. Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ)
8. Childline Foundation
9. Citizens' Health Initiative
10. Consumers Association of Penang
11. Engage
12. Federation of Reproductive Health Associations, Malaysia
13. Foreign Spouses Support Group
14. Galen Centre for Health & Social Policy
15. Health Equity Initiatives
16. IDRIS Association
17. In Between Cultura
18. Institute for Education Development, Social, Religious, and Cultural Studies (INFEST)
19. International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF)
20. International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW-AP)
21. Johor Yellow Flame (JYF)
22. Justice For Sisters
23. KRYSS Network
24. Labour Law Reform Coalition
25. Local Unionist Networks (Malaysia)
26. Majlis Tindakan Ekonomi Melayu
27. Malaysian Campaign For Equal Citizenship
28. MyPJ (Persatuan Penduduk Petaling Jaya)
29. North South Initiative
30. Our Journey
31. Parti Sosialis Malaysia
32. Penang Forum
33. Penang Heritage Trust
34. Penang Hills Watch
35. Penang Stop Trafficking Campaign
36. Peoples Like Us Support Ourselves (PLUsos)

37. Persatuan Komuniti Prihatin Selangor & KL
38. Persatuan Penduduk Galing Besar Kuantan
39. Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor (PSWS)
40. Persekutuan Persatuan-Persatuan Lembaga Pengurus Sekolah Cina Malaysia (Dong Zong)
41. Pertubuhan IKRAM Malaysia
42. Pertubuhan Solidariti Hijau Kuantan
43. Pertubuhan Wanita Malaysia untuk Kawalan Tembakau & Kesihatan (MyWATCH)
44. Positive Malaysian Treatment Access & Advocacy Group (MTAAG+)
45. Pusat KOMAS
46. Sahabat Alam Malaysia
47. Save Malaysia Stop Lynas
48. Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia
49. SUARAM (Suara Rakyat Malaysia)
50. Tanjung Bungah Residents Association (TBRA)
51. Third World Network
52. Toy Libraries Malaysia
53. Women's Aid Organisation
54. Women's Centre for Change (WCC)

Individual:

1. Abel Benjamin Lim
2. Andrew Filmer
3. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Aini Hamid
4. Andrew Khoo
5. S Arutchelvam
6. Chee Yoke Ling
7. Chan Yit Fei
8. Charis Loke
9. Dr Chee Heng Leng
10. Chen Yoke Pin
11. Chia Kien Eng
12. Choong Tet Sieu
13. Chow Chee Keong
14. Chris Lowe
15. Dr Chua Hang Kuen
16. Foo Wei Meng
17. Dr Jane Cardoso
18. Janet Pillai
19. Dr Jeyakumar Devaraj
20. Dr Kam Suan Pheng
21. Karen Lai
22. Khoo Ai Wah
23. Prof Khoo Boo Teik
24. Dr Khoo Teng Jian
25. Dr Khoo Teng Xiang

26. Kuppamal Ramasamy
27. Lee Chin Ark
28. Lee Khek Mui
29. Lee-Lim Ai Ping
30. Lew Chee Leng
31. Dr Lim Chee Han
32. Lim Kah Cheng
33. Lim Poh Im
34. Loo Que Lin
35. Low Swee Heong
36. Dr Lynn Lim
37. Dr Mohd Nasir
38. Mok Yim Paik
39. Ng Fun Boon
40. Norhidayah Nadila Maulad Daud
41. Dr Peter Gan Kim Soon
42. Prema Devaraj
43. Dr. Rajadorai Natarajah
44. Radziah Binti Othuman Sahib
45. Roslin bt Ludiin
46. Sathesh Raj
47. Shanthi Dairam
48. Sharon Khoo
49. A Sivarajan
50. Dr Sharuna Verghis
51. Sherley Tan
52. Soh Sook Hwa
53. Stefan Dawson
54. Syed Mohamed Shahrudin
55. Tan Pek Leng
56. Dr Toh Kin Woon
57. Dr Vivian Lee
58. Prof Wong Chin Huat
59. Wong Hoy Cheong
60. Wong Sau Ngan
61. Yap Heng Lung
62. Yatie Jonet
63. Yeap Jin Soo
64. Yee Pey Cheng
65. Zi Qing Low