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CALL FOR ECONOMIC AID

'INCLUDE RELIEF MEASURES IN MCO'

Loan moratorium, utility discounts proposed by architects' body

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THE Malaysian Architects Association (PAM) called for more restrictive curbs similar to the first Movement Control Order (MCO) to stem rising infections, but they should be coupled with measures to help people survive the economic downturn.

PAM president Datuk Ar Ezumi Harzani Ismail said drastic measures need to be taken to avert a crisis to national security.

"We are reaching a tipping point, where health and safety takes precedence over others and a Conditional MCO is not effective to reduce the rise of Covid-19 cases.

"Instead, the uncertainty only makes it more challenging to plan and execute our work in an effective manner.

"We are equally concerned about the continuous challenges suffered by businesses and employers affected by the MCO.

"In fighting this pandemic, the public and private sector have to work together to preserve jobs and ensure business survival for long-term job security instead of one-off subsidies to individuals," he said in a statement yesterday.

Ezumi said if the government went ahead with a full-blown MCO, it would need to be coupled with measures for business and employee survival.

"The government should apply the 'Economic Standstill' model, which includes six months loan repayment moratorium, and utility bill deferments to reduce operational costs to businesses and individual expenses.

"There must be a lateral cost sharing policy, with 25 per cent reduction in business property rental, residential property rental, private employees and public servant wages.

"Utility bill rebates or discounts of up to 25 per cent for residential properties should be given to support employees working from home, as well as students studying from home.

"There should also be subsidised high-speed Internet throughout the MCO period, to encourage working from home."

Ezumi said the vaccination rollout should be expedited, with tax claimable incentives for private initiatives.

"Special grants or tax relief for digitalisation and automation of businesses to increase productivity, including relief on hardware and software, are also needed.

"The Covid-19 (Temporary Measures) Act 2020 should be amended, as recommended by the construction industry stakeholders, to include provisions for General Extension of Time and

Cost Sharing for Covid-19 related and preventive measure provisions.

"Digital transmission for documents and online payment transactions, including submission of tenders, applications for plan approvals, submission of reports, plan fee payments as well as development charges, should be enabled.

"Virtual meetings and discussions with, and among, local authorities as well as regulators without the need to be physically present or queuing at the service counter,

and to ensure continuity of statutory approval process without delay, need to be in place also.

"Others include selected essential services and critical construction, maintenance and repair work to continue to prevent the risk to safety and health if not attended to," he said.

Ezumi said after the MCO, selected economic sectors with low business activities may gradually resume while other sectors might need to operate a mix of remote and on-site working for a longer period.

"We anticipate that a full MCO coupled with expedient vaccination rollout will curb the spread of Covid-19 and enable us to begin the transition toward normalcy and herd immunity," he said.



Datuk Ar Ezumi Harzani Ismail