

Trade chambers: Follow SOP or we'll be in trouble

PETALING JAYA: As the country goes into its second year of the Covid-19 pandemic, businesses and trade chambers are hoping everyone will apply wisely the lessons learnt in the past year.

The trade chambers are urging everyone to strictly adhere to the SOP as a rise in the number of cases may wield a bigger blow to the economy than the first movement control order last March.

This, they say, is because companies are in a worse position now.

Associated Chinese Chamber and Industry of Malaysia president Tan Sri Ter Leong Yap said everyone must take their roles seriously in stopping the pandemic and ensuring the nation did not go into another lockdown.

Ter suggested mass screening be put in place as soon as possible so those infected could be identified and treated to contain the virus.

“We are seeing a high number of cases every day now. And if it goes higher, even if there is no official announcement of an economic shutdown, who will dare to venture out to buy things and conduct business?”

“When we first went into the MCO last March, businesses still had savings and were in a better position to stop awhile.

“We did extremely well by bringing the cases down to zero as all of us were cautious and followed the SOP.

“However, as the economic activities opened up, we let our guard down, leading to our current situation.

“This time, businesses have suffered (some have shuttered) and we are in a much worse position.

“We have no choice but to stand strong together and practise the SOP.

“The government too must be strict to ensure everyone adheres to the SOP.

“There must however be one rule for all, with one spokesman from the government,” said Ter when contacted.

Malay Chamber of Commerce Malaysia vice-

president Norsyahrin Hamidon said the pandemic forced small and medium-size businesses to embrace e-commerce to stay resilient.

He said this might not have happened so quickly if the pandemic had not hit.

“When the pandemic first hit

last January, as was the case with the rest of the world, we did not know how to react.

“We then agreed to close our businesses but we realised that the effects of shutting down the economy was just as bad as the virus when people started losing jobs and companies closed down,” he said.

He noted that millions of people were affected when SMEs had no business, because their employees had multiple dependents.

“The moratoriums on loans, subsidies and financial assistance from the government in various economic packages in the past one year helped the economy to get back on its feet.

“Sadly, businesses were lax on following the SOP and many took it for granted.

“If we are forced to hunker down once more, it may almost be impossible to get up again as these are SMEs with small capitals.

“The SMEs cannot survive without government assistance and we must not take for granted that with the economy having been reopened, everything is normal.

“We must apply the lessons we learnt in the past year, strictly adhere to the SOP and embrace e-commerce as much as possible,” said Norsyahrin when contacted.

Federation of Manufacturers Malaysia president Tan Sri Soh Thian Lai said it was worrying that after one year of the pandemic, there were currently 30% of Covid-19 clusters from the manufacturing sector.

“The business sector cannot withstand another round of total lockdown similar to the MCO of last March.

“A second full lockdown will lead to irreparable damage to the economy, with

devastating impact on business survival and job security.

“So it is crucial for the industry to give its fullest cooperation and play its part by taking additional proactive and preventive measures to tighten the existing SOP at the workplace and living quarters of employees,” said Soh in a statement.

He proposed that manufacturing companies pay attention to strict SOP in their workers’ hostels as these were the main source of infection in the sector. He said business owners must not take the SOP for granted and that the top management must ensure the virus was contained.

Soh also called on the government to work with local councils to facilitate manufacturers’ effort in providing better housing for workers.

“We also hope the government can subsidise the cost of the RTK-antigen test kits so that employers in all the states under MCO can conclude mandatory screening by the deadline,” he said.

He said a transparent and comprehensive national Covid-19 vaccination programme for the entire population might prove to be the key to economic recovery.