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# A new reality for everyone

Local tourism operators are bracing for an uncertain future as interstate travel is banned in the current MCO.

THE latest phase of the movement control order that was announced earlier this week has forced local tourism players to resign to operating in a very fragile and uncertain environment.

Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (Matta) president Datuk Tan Kok Liang said this is a new reality that those employed in the tourism sector have to grapple with.

"This uncertain business environment is a new reality for tourism players," he said.

Tan said the industry had anticipated a recovery in the domestic tourism sector this year, but the MCO has thrown a spanner in the works.

"With the announcement of another MCO, I anticipate the leisure travel sector to be the worst hit. The situation is really very fragile and uncertain," he said.

In a special televised address, Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the MCO will be implemented in six states namely Penang, Selangor, Melaka, Johor and Sabah, as well as the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and Labuan.

The MCO will be enforced for 14 days until Jan 26.

Meanwhile, conditional MCO will be enforced in Pahang, Perak, Negri Sembilan, Kedah, Terengganu and Kelantan. The recovery MCO will be implemented in Perlis and Sarawak, although Kuching, Miri and Sibul are currently under the conditional MCO due to a spike in cases in recent weeks.

During this period, interstate travel is not allowed throughout the whole country, except for those who work in essential services, and those who have been granted permission by the police.

According to Tan, the latest travel restrictions would mean that those employed in tourism may need to consider their options and other alternatives.

He said tourism workers should start looking for jobs in other industries to make ends meet.

It was a point that Tan had



Popular destinations and attractions, like Petaling Street in Kuala Lumpur, are expected to be deserted once more during the new MCO. — LOW BOON TAT/The Star

put across when speaking to *The Star* last year.

"Tourism staff should also go for reskilling and training programmes to better themselves during this time," he said.

## No revenue

Meanwhile, hotels in the country are bracing for the loss of all revenue streams with the implementation of another MCO.

Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) chief executive officer Yap Lip Seng said while the MCO is necessary to curb the spread of Covid-19, it will do further damage to the tourism and hospitality industry.

"With the implementation of restrictions, businesses are again

expected to lose all revenue streams, especially for the tourism industry as all interstate travel is now restricted," he said.

Yap said the government must support the industry and its people.

"With little to no revenue, businesses will not be able to retain its workers or pay salaries and (will soon) have no option but to let go of its employees," he said.

Yap urged the government to introduce a wage subsidy structure of 50% for employees with a pay structure below RM4,000 and 30% for those up to RM8,000.

"Industries need this to sustain, or else employers would be forced to retrench employees with immediate effect," he said.

MAH recorded a minimum of

6% hospitality workers being let go since last year, while the rest either received pay cuts or were forced to take unpaid leave.

Malaysia Budget Hotel Association (MyBHA) national deputy president Sri Ganesh Michiel said the MCO will have a huge impact towards the recovery period of the hospitality and tourism industry.

"We demand that the government look seriously and act fast on the issues currently facing our association members, their employees and all tourism industry players," he said.

Ganesh said while he understood the need for the MCO, he hopes the government would assist the industry accordingly "before it's too late".



Hotel players in Malaysia are worried about the impact the MCO will have on the hospitality industry this year. — Pixabay

"We also advise all of our members to be strict in implementing the SOPs to prevent further spread of the Covid-19 virus," he said.

Meanwhile, Bernama reported that ticket bookings for express buses in the peninsular went up by 30% last month.

In the same report, Peninsular Malay Express Bus Operators Association president Mohamed Kaharrudin Salleh said that the increase in demand for express bus services helped a few operators to recover some of the losses they had suffered earlier in the year.

He added that last year's ban on interstate travel had resulted in express bus operators suffering from financial loss, having difficulty meeting monthly repayments on 737 buses, and paying the salaries of its 3,000 employees.

With the new interstate travel ban, bus operators are expected to face the same problems again.