



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Letter to the Editor

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Do more for foreign labourers in need

Governments all over the world have made the decision to put their countries in some form of lockdown as a step to battle the COVID-19 disease. While obviously necessary, the lockdowns have left a segment of these countries' population in a very vulnerable situation.

In Malaysia, the Movement Control Order 2020 (MCO) has put foreign labourers, be they documented or undocumented, in a dangerous situation as most of them have reported not receiving any salary from their employers or any form of aid in terms of food and other daily necessities.

It is only recently that the government has allowed the NGOs that were stopped from their usual distribution of aid (food, toiletries, etc) to resume their work, if they follow the SOP that has been set out. However, most of these NGOs already have their predetermined target groups that need their aid, such as the handicapped, old folks, and more. It is not feasible for these NGOs to look out for all the foreign labourers who are in dire need on top of the people they usually help.

It makes sense then that despite the foreign embassies in Malaysia requesting NGOs to aid their nationals, the Defence Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob has urged embassies to actively provide aid to their people by liaising with the respective district disaster management committees. He said that the government would help in procuring the things that the embassies need for their aid efforts.

Still the government should do more to aid foreign labourers. When asked about the fate of refugees the Defence Minister said that "the government won't allow citizens local or foreign to go hungry". It is vital that the government also take the initiative to fund the aid efforts for foreign labourers. Foreign labourers are not considered citizens, but we must remember that even if they are not, they are here in Malaysia doing jobs that many locals would not do themselves.

The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) calls on the government to not only facilitate the aid efforts of foreign embassies and NGOs to help foreign labourers, but to also provide to it financially under the COVID-19 stimulus package as foreign labourers are an important part of our country and also on humanitarian grounds.

CAP also ask that foreign labourers, particularly undocumented ones, be assured that they have nothing to fear in receiving this aid; just as they are free to get tested for COVID-19 without being reported to the authorities.

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