



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

Websites:
www.consumer.org.my

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109
email: consumerofpenang@gmail.com

Press Statement

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MCO-related policies need clear guidelines

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) is aghast at how the economic stimulus package left gaps of problems unaddressed.

Even though the government touted that every tier of society would benefit from the economic stimulus package that was announced on 27th March, there are glaring loopholes that need to be fixed urgently.

The government should address the problem of escalating food prices as it is its responsibility to see if the cause of it is because of profiteering or an avoidable disruption in the supply chain.

For example, it was reported late last month that fruit producers and wholesalers had to dump an estimated 10,000 tonnes of fruits in the Klang Valley alone since the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO). Cameron Highlands farmers dump hundreds of tonnes of vegetables. They share the same problems concerning the logistic of sending their produce to the market and the regulations imposed by authorities. The same applies to fishermen because the middlemen no longer buy the fish from them as the markets are closed.

Can the government create Green Lanes for transport delivering food supplies throughout the country? It is nothing new because the European Union (EU) was already proposing it before EU member states started closing their border as an anticipation of the threat by Covid-19. Green Lanes are fast-track lanes put in place across borders (or in Malaysia's case, interstate or district borders) for the delivering of supplies. If we had Green Lanes, then food supplies can be transported throughout the country unimpeded despite MCO.

On the other hand, the public should also cease panic buying. A explanation given by a psychologist for panic buying is that hoarding is a natural human response to scarcity or perceive scarcity. With the government's announcement of MCO implementation, rational or irrational fear kicks in, particularly having seen the situation in China's lockdown for months. The government's assurance of enough stock was not reassuring because of the numerous elements of uncertainties.

In the case of Malaysia, it is partly irrational fear and emotion, this is why people initially wiped out entire stocks of toilet rolls even though in our culture, the bidet is easily available. To aggravate the situation, the government announced the implementation of MCO lacking details leaving those affected clueless about what is going to happen next.

To give another example, after the announcement of MCO on 17 March, universities and institutes of higher learnings ceased all educational activities and sent their students home before the start of MCO the next day. Students panicked to beat the deadline to 'balik kampung' and it singularly defeated the aim of MCO: the prevention of large gathering of people whereby a contagion can spread like wildfire. We cannot blame the institutes of higher learnings as they were just following the instructions passed

down by the government to cease operation and thus, not knowing what is expected of them, asked their students to head home. The students should have remained within the safe confines of their hostels or rented domicile. But again, many of them have financial limitations for food and other necessities without knowing how long the MCO is going to last.

Another point of interest is that parents who usually send their children to day-care are suddenly told by the operators that they have to pay the full fees. Parents are outraged because day-care centres would not be providing any service during the entire MCO and so there is no reason why they must be charged. Moreover, the caretakers and the owners of these centres can apply funding from the economic stimulus package.

In all that we can see is a lack of planning with clear guidelines leaving implementers to decide how they are to interpret the general announcements made by the government, some resulting in embarrassing U-turns. As such we call on the government to come up with comprehensive guidelines to instil confidence in the people.



Mohideen Abdul Kader
President
Consumers Association of Penang