SENIOR MINISTER
MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND INDUSTRY

MEDIA STATEMENT

SAFE@WORK
TO BALANCE SAFETY AND LIVES
OF WORKERS WITH ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILTY

Yesterday, YAB Prime Minister announced the Strategic Program to Empower the People and the Economy (PEMERKASA) aimed at jump starting and revitalising the country's economy which is currently in the fifth stage of the 6R Strategy under the Comprehensive Economic Recovery Plan. In order to ensure the competitiveness and sustainability of the industrial sector and commercial enterprises in contributing to the country's economic recovery, the protection of the safety and health of workers is paramount.

Based on data by the Crisis Preparedness and Response Center (CPRC) under the Ministry of Health, MITI views with concern the COVID-19 outbreak in the premises of the manufacturing and related services sectors. As at March 16, 2021, the manufacturing sector accounted for 58.1 per cent or 194 clusters of COVID-19 cases in the country.

Thus, MITI has taken a proactive and responsive step by introducing a comprehensive initiative known as Safe@Work aimed at balancing the operational sustainability of the manufacturing sector with the control of the spread of the pandemic among workers.

Safe@Work is a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that can be implemented by companies in the manufacturing sector requiring employers to provide safe accommodation for employees as well as comply with standards under the Minimum Standards of Accommodation and Housing for Employees Act 1990 (Act 446). It also entails responsibilities relating to management of employees who are COVID-19 positive, close contacts, health screening as well as measures to prevent transmission among employees.

This initiative is calculated at preventing disruption of company operations and reducing the adverse impact on productivity in the event of an occurrence of a positive case of COVID-19 in business premises. Commitment and support from employers are crucial in ensuring the safety and health of employees. This effort is very important in order to contribute to the continuation of economic activity.

Safe@Work is the result of a series of engagement sessions and consultations with public and private sector stakeholders including the Ministry of Health, National Security Council, Department of Labor, Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM), industry associations and chambers, local and international businesses.

Based on the current practice, in the event of an occurrence of a positive case, close contact workers must be quarantined and barred from working until all of them are certified COVID-19 free after undergoing health screening tests. Now, the Safe@Work initiative will allow close contact workers to continue working under a new protocol known as the Safe Work Bubble. In accordance with this protocol, close contact workers will be isolated from the local community as well as other workers until all of them are certified COVID-19 free based on screening test results.

Some of the main aspects emphasized under the "Safe Work Bubble" are as follows:

i. Establishment of Safe Work Bubble for close contact workers in factory areas and employee accommodation premises;
ii. Establishment of COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness and Response Team (PERT) by the company for the preparation and implementation of procedures to manage emergency cases;
iii. Ongoing sanitation processes at manufacturing premises;
iv. Permission to use employee vehicles at full capacity;
v. Provision and management of conducive employee accommodation;
vi. Implementation of targeted screening for employees of the manufacturing and related services sectors; and
vii. Provision of information channels related to pandemic control procedures from employers to employees.

As an incentive to companies implementing Safe@Work, the Government will provide additional tax deductions to companies under the manufacturing and related services sector in respect of rentals of employee hostel premises and the provision of related equipment such as CCTV, wearable tracking devices and other basic necessities needed to comply with the Safe@Work SOP. Expenses eligible for this additional tax deduction are limited to RM50,000 per company. Companies can register in the COVID-19 Intelligent Management System (CIMS) from April 1, 2021.

MITI hopes that with Safe@Work, companies in the manufacturing and related services sectors will improve their level of compliance with their SOPs to ensure that companies can continue to operate as usual.

This is in line with the whole of society approach to foster an attitude of self-reliance and a spirit of responsibility in society. In this context, it cannot be overstressed that the role of industry is paramount in order to jointly realize the Government's desire to balance the demands of protecting lives and livelihoods.

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