Lee: ‘We are doing podcasts, digital launches and digital conferences for our clients. This is the only way to survive.’

Avinash: ‘I hope people will band together and do the right thing instead of being careless.’

However, the MCO has affected even digital events, says Lee. His company schedule is empty from March until June due to cancellations and postponements, says Lee, whose events management company, Moomin Events, has a workforce of 12 people and an overhead of RM50,000 a month.

‘Every company, client, supplier, host and even staff has their own commitment. Businesses are advised to temporarily close, but our commitment is still on the run. Staff have to pay for their house, car, groceries and other necessities. Our company has offered interest-free loans to staff — two months advance salary with repayment tenure of 12 months and zero interest,’ he says.

Lee calls on the government to provide more assistance to companies to help them tide over during this time.

‘I strongly support the MCO. Let’s not be selfish as this is a worldwide pandemic,’ he says.

MEF calls for flexibility in allowing for Covid-19 unpaid leave

THE statement by Defence Minister Dato Seri Ismail Sabri that all private sector employers must pay their employees’ minimum wage during the two weeks of the move- ment control order (MCO) has no force of law, says the Malaysian Employers’ Federation (MEF).

‘There is the question of whether employers are legally obliged to pay salaries throughout the four-teen-day MCO. This is a situation of force majeure, a frustration of contract, an event that is beyond the reasonable control of either employer or employee. In this kind of situation, whether party has the right to nullify the contract,’ MEF executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan tells Sunday Star.

While some companies have introduced work from home policies, others have completely shut over the MCO but are still bearing overhead costs such as wages and rent.

Ismail reportedly said on Friday that employees should not force their employers to take unpaid leave and action will be taken against employers who do not comply.

‘If we are not careful and insist for employers to bear all the cost, a lot of respondents may not happen,’ says Shamsuddin, acknowledging the current difficult economic situation.

Nevertheless, the MEF says that it wishes to see businesses maintain employment for as long as possible, beyond the 14 days of MCO.

It has been reported that up to one million Malaysians could lose their jobs in the next six months with monthly wages of RM 4,000 and below who are forced to take unpaid leave during the MCO.

The MCO is enforced from March 18 to March 31.

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Calls for another updated stimulus package

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan has called for an updated stimulus package to take into consideration recent developments in fighting Covid-19.

While some bigger companies have contingency plans to minimise the impact of Covid-19, many micro-enterprises with five or fewer employees are not prepared at all, says Shamsuddin.

He explains that there are about 650,000 micro-enterprises in Malaysia.

Says Shamsuddin: ‘I think the government is also looking at expanding the stimulus package to provide extended income support for affected industries. That would be helpful to sustain their spending,’ he says.

Yeeoh recommends for those who are least affected by Covid-19 to continue with their daily spending according to their means.

‘If spending steps, the economy grinds to a halt. It will deepen the economic downturn if consumers were to stop spending considering that household spending accounts for nearly 60% of GDP,’ he says.

In a public health crisis where lives are involved, public health takes precedence over economic priorities, says Yeeoh.

‘In order for the country to survive the crisis with the least amount of loss of life and to minimise the negative economic impact, we all must work to contain the virus,’ he says in support of the MCO.

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The MCO will also give a 2% discount to all power consumers in commercial, industrial and agricultural as well as domestic sectors for six months to help cushion the financial impact.

The initial stimulus package of RM 600 million announced on Feb 27 outlined a large range of incentives including tax breaks and post-ponements, and discounts for affected parties.

Help daily wage earners

The Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) secretary general J. Solomon has called on the government to provide social assistance to daily paid casual workers who depend on the daily wages to make ends meet, particularly if they are from vulnerable sectors.

There would be a list of eligible categories in overtime, commissions and performance bonuses with these sectors (construction, household and other service sectors) facing huge revenue losses. So the list will be brought forward to March 16 from its initial date in May with an additional RM 100 monthly to B40 recipients later in the year.

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