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SNEF-SBF-ASME Joint Media Statement on Temporary Financial Relief for Employers with Malaysian Workers Affected by Lockdown in Malaysia

20 March 2020

The Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF), Singapore Business Federation (SBF), Association of Small & Medium Enterprises (ASME), together with trade associations and chambers¹ support the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) in acting swiftly to help employers find accommodation for Malaysian workers affected by the nationwide lockdown in Malaysia, as well as the provision of temporary financial assistance to employers.

2. Malaysian workers who commute daily between Singapore and Malaysia form an integral part of the Singapore workforce. These workers serve in various industries, with many working in companies that provide essential services such as healthcare, cleaning, public transport, logistics and waste management. Many also work in the service, retail and hospitality sectors to serve Singaporeans, while those working in the manufacturing, technology and engineering sectors supplement the local workforce to meet production commitments.

3. Due to the sudden implementation of a Movement Control Order in Malaysia, business operations, including the provision of essential services, would have been affected if no action had been taken to ensure employers have sufficient manpower to maintain normal operations. The local workers in these businesses would also have been affected if they had to continue operations with less manpower.

¹ The Federation of Merchants' Associations, Singapore (FMAS), Restaurant Association of Singapore (RAS), Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI), Singapore Furniture Industries Council (SFIC), Singapore Logistics Association (SLA), Singapore Manufacturing Federation (SMF), Singapore Precision Engineering & Technology Association (SPETA) and Textile and Fashion Federation (TaFF)

4. In addition, as employers struggle to cut costs amid the current dire situation to save jobs, the provision of accommodation for affected Malaysian workers would add on to their cost burdens.

5. Due to the current low hotel occupancy, many employers are able to provide lodging for their Malaysian workers at reasonable priced hotels in short notice while looking for more cost-effective solutions. Hence, the financial support of \$50 per night, as announced by MOM, for each affected worker for 14 nights would go a long way in helping employers defray part of the additional costs incurred.

6. Trade associations and chambers in Singapore have also supported the Government's efforts. For instance, the Singapore Furniture Industries Council assisted in procuring mattresses while others like the Singapore Hotel Association helped to coordinate requests from employers in search of hotel rooms.

7. Said Dr Robert Yap, President, SNEF, "The Government, unions and employers are working together to house Malaysian workers affected by the sudden lockdown in Malaysia. Employers appreciate the financial relief that MOM has swiftly rolled out, which is helpful in assisting them to cope with the situation. I also thank the Malaysian workers who have decided to stay and work in Singapore. Planning ahead, I urge employers to make suitable short-term housing arrangements for their Malaysian workers to take care of their welfare and minimise disruptions to their operations."

8. Said Mr Teo Siong Seng, Chairman, SBF, "The swift response of the Government in helping to identify suitable accommodation options for Malaysian workers as well as providing financial assistance to affected companies is much appreciated by the business community. In this time of uncertainty, every bit of help for our companies counts. This allows our companies time to work out more sustainable arrangements and allows companies, particularly those in the essential services sectors, to continue to provide much needed services in Singapore. In light of the rapidly evolving situation, we strongly urge our companies to have their BCP in place to minimize disruption to their business and customers."

9. Said Mr Kurt Wee, President, ASME, "ASME Council was actively helping businesses with their Business Continuity Planning prior to and during the announcement of the Malaysian Lockdown. We applaud the Minister for Manpower's assistance in less than 24 hours of the event. The measure is swift, targeted and relevant to the immediate needs of SMEs. We also recognise the Government for identifying the industries that most needed help and offering immediate accommodation information and measures for many of the SMEs."

For media enquiries, please contact:

Singapore National Employers Federation Chua Ker Sin Director, Corporate Research, Planning and External Relations Email: kschua@snef.org.sg	Singapore Business Federation Irene Kew Director, Marketing and Corporate Communications Email: irene.kew@sbf.org.sg
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