

Labuan nitespots want to reopen

LABUAN: The Labuan Entertainment Centre Owners Association on Wednesday appealed to the Federal government to allow its members to resume operations, saying they are facing huge losses to the tune of RM600,000 since the start of the Movement Control Order (MCO) in March.

It said entertainment businesses on the duty-free-island should be allowed to reopen business operations, with standard operating procedures (SOPs) strictly adhered to.

Its pro tem chairman Frederick Chua said all the entertainment operators have been hard hit by the order to suspend operations.

“Along with other entertainment businesses including sports bars facing zero income, we are dipping into reserves to keep staff on payroll during the shutdown,” he said in an interview

with Bernama on Wednesday.

Chua said spa, wellness and reflexology services, including those provided by blind masseurs, have resumed operations since July 1, and entertainment businesses should also be allowed to reopen.

Sport/bars and entertainment venues, cinemas, nightclubs and karaoke outlets were ordered to suspend operations with the enforcement of the MCO on March 18 as part of a series of strict new rules to limit crowds and minimise the risk of further spreading Covid-19.

“Everybody is facing losses because even if you don’t run the business you have to pay salaries, electricity bills, monthly rentals as well as suppliers.

“It is hard to quantify exactly how much money is at stake, but entertainment businesses in Labuan being a duty-free-island and oil and gas hub

have incurred a loss of more than RM600,000 over the last three months without earning a single penny,” he said.

“Right now we cannot cover rental of RM10,000 per month, we can barely afford to pay expenses and salaries.

“We have not been accumulating profits for the last three months, not all commercial landlords are holding back on rent relief,” he said, noting only a few of the operators are receiving wage subsidies.

“Labuan is already a Covid-19 green zone with no new cases over the last one month, and Labuan being an oil and gas hub with a high number of foreign ship crews who are always looking for entertainment.

“Most of these foreign ship crews are on standby on their ship for a period of two weeks, before signing on for a new

call of duty, and while on standby, they want to disembark to Labuan for entertainment.

“When they are in Labuan town, they will usually stay overnight in hotels including budget hotels and eat at our local restaurants...this will help generate economic activities,” Chua said.

He said if the government could consider allowing entertainment businesses to resume operations, social distancing SOPs would be strictly adhered to.

“We will not open the dance floor to customers and ensure the table arrangement is in accordance with the SOP or one metre in between, and our guard will be on stand-by at the main door to record all the patrons’ details and ensure only those with no symptoms are allowed into our premises,” he said. — Bernama