

#ProjekMuhibah

# **STRATEGY 4: OPENING UP ECONOMIC SECTORS SAFELY**

## **Gearing up for an Endemic COVID-19**



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#ProjekMuhibah introduces ten strategies to address the socio-economic challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. Our analyses and proposals will help Malaysia build back better, towards a more resilient and equitable economy, a more economically secure workforce, and a stronger and more supportive community.



## I INTRODUCTION

The third quarter of 2021 has been marked by a series of strict lockdowns aimed at relieving the country's overburdened healthcare system. In [Strategy 2](#), we emphasised that the government needed to have a clear strategy to reopen the economy instead of relying solely on debilitating lockdowns and a rising vaccination rate.









Now that nearly 75% of the estimated adult population in Malaysia has been fully vaccinated as of mid-September 2021, and with the [actual death rate, case numbers and ICU utilisation rate falling significantly in the Klang Valley](#) one month after the conclusion of Operation Surge Capacity (OSC), there is an urgent need more than ever before to conduct a safe, responsible and comprehensive reopening of various economic sectors.

In Strategy 4 of this series on how to manage the COVID-19 health and economic crisis, **we outline different frameworks to structure the reopening of the economy in a manner which is safe, responsible, based on science and data in a manner which will also boost consumer confidence so that we can experience a stronger economic bounce back.** Needless to say, clear standard operating procedures (SOPs) as highlighted in our [Strategy 2 brief](#) must accompany the safe re-opening of the economy.

At the same time, we must not “waste” the vaccination efforts undertaken by our frontliners even as the number of COVID-19 cases declines, especially the serious cases. As we open up the economy, processes need to be put in place so that even if the number of cases rises again, we will not have

to repeatedly close down the economy, at least on the same scale as what took place during the previous three Movement Control Orders (MCOs).

In this Strategy 4 paper, we will discuss the following issues in detail:

-  Proper sequencing of opening up the economy
-  Releasing more granular data to help economic recovery and boost consumer confidence
-  Open up based on comparative risk and science, not based on public fear mongering
-  Open schools and institutions of higher learning
-  Allow interstate travel and open up borders for safe travel
-  Issue clear SOPs
-  Each Ministry must submit an Economic Recovery Plan to the National Security Council (NSC) / Majlis Keselamatan Negara (MKN) for public viewing
-  Once we open up, we need to do whatever it takes not to close down the economy again

## PROPER SEQUENCING OF OPENING UP THE ECONOMY

By the time this strategy is published, many sectors of the economy will have opened up and operated at different capacities<sup>1</sup>. While this reopening is much needed to ensure the economic survival of many of these industries, many of these announcements were made with little attention to proper sequencing based on science and data.

As the vaccination rate continues to increase for each state and will likely reach 90% of the estimated adult population by the end of September / early October, we recommend **abolishing the categorisation of states according to Phase 1 to 4** especially since the initial phasing no longer applies (See Figure 1 below).

Instead of phases, we recommend that there should be a proper sequencing of the re-opening of the various economic sectors with differentiated SOPs, testing requirements and operating capacity which are [based on science and data](#). For example, if live musical shows and comedies are allowed at 30% capacity for fully vaccinated individuals, there should be no reason why gyms with stricter SOPs, more comprehensive ventilation guidelines, and proper physical distancing should not be allowed to operate with a reduced capacity.

Even within a certain industry or economic sector, it makes sense for **proper sequencing as a strategy to allow operators to**

Figure 1: Categorisation of Phase 1 to Phase 4 under the first announced National Recovery Plan (NRP) on June 15, 2021



Source: MoH Malaysia<sup>2</sup>

**open up slowly and with adequate preparation.** Rather than making piecemeal announcements for specific industries under the jurisdiction of a particular ministry, the NSC should coordinate and map out the reopening of various sectors of the economy under ALL of the ministries under a properly sequenced arrangement. The parameters and considerations used for reopening should be transparently communicated to the public.

This will increase confidence and certainty among the different industry players and will allow them to make the proper preparation for the opening up of their respective industries. This can be **done in a more coordinated fashion if EACH MINISTRY prepares a national recovery plan for the economic sectors under their respective jurisdictions** (more on this later). Making clear that there is this larger sequencing plan will minimise people questioning individual announcements by the government, such as the decision to allow indoor sporting activities except gyms for fully vaccinated individuals in states under [Phase 1](#) and [Phase 2](#) (as of September 9).



## RELEASING MORE GRANULAR DATA TO HELP ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND BOOST CONSUMER CONFIDENCE

It took many restaurants approximately 2 weeks after dining-in privileges for the Klang Valley were first announced on August 19 and was allowed starting on August 20 to allow for dining-in. Even now, there are still many restaurants that are not prepared to accommodate dining-in for various reasons. Some reasons include the fact that not all of their staff are fully vaccinated, concerns associated with high case numbers in the Klang Valley as well as the time taken to rehire staff that were let go during MCO 3.0, just to name a few.

To boost consumer confidence, we need to show that the vaccination programme is effective in reducing the number of serious COVID-19 cases, especially in the states where the vaccination rate among the adult population has exceeded 80%. In addition, we need to show the [success of the national vaccination programme](#) so that more sectors of the economy can be opened up safely and responsibly.

For example, if an explicit breakdown of the Category 1 to 5 COVID-19 patients can be shown for Selangor and KL respectively and if these figures show a significant downtrend over the past 2 weeks in the number of Category 3 to 5 cases, more consumers would feel safer coming out to dine-in and to visit shopping malls. This will also give greater confidence to those who sit on the NSC to open up sectors of the economy which are seen as “higher risk” such as gyms.

We propose the following **categorisation of important COVID-19 related data which needs to be released on a daily**

**basis and also the recommended level of granularity right down to district-level data** (Table 1 below). Policy makers can use this data at different levels of granularity to make better policy decisions. Businesses can also use this data to plan their workflows and internal team arrangements. Consumers can use this information to plan their family, work and social activities.

It is timely that MOH has been releasing more data via its [COVID-19 GitHub site](#) and the recently launched [COVIDNOW portal](#) and we hope that more granular data can be released quickly and efficiently as the economy opens up further.



Table 1: Data to be collected and released at the national, state and district levels

Category and Indicator	Nationwide Data	State-level Data	District-level Data
<b>Case</b>			
New daily cases	✓	✓	✓ <sup>a</sup>
Active cases by severity	✓ <sup>b</sup>	✓ <sup>c</sup>	✗
New daily cases by vaccination status (fully and partially vaccinated and unvaccinated)	✗ <sup>b</sup>	✗	✗
<b>Test</b>			
Number of tests conducted	✓	✓	✗
Number of tests by type (PCR or Antigen)	✓	✓	✗
<b>Hospitalisations</b>			
Active cases requiring ICU or ventilator support	✓	✓	✗
New daily cases requiring ICU or ventilator support	✓	~ <sup>d</sup>	✗
<b>Deaths</b>			
New daily deaths	✓	✓	✗
Deaths by vaccination status	~ <sup>e</sup>	~ <sup>e</sup>	✗
Deaths by profile (age, sex, nationality, etc.)	~ <sup>e</sup>	~ <sup>e</sup>	✗
<b>Vaccinations</b>			
Vaccination rates (% of adult/total population)	✓	✓	✗
Vaccination rates by brand of vaccine	✓ <sup>f</sup>	✓ <sup>f</sup>	✗



- ✓ indicates availability of data
  - ✗ indicates absence of data
  - ~ indicates partial or implicit availability of data (incl. raw data)
- 
- a Not on a centralised platform and not part of the GitHub database or COVIDNOW. District-level data is only available through the respective state-level health departments' websites/social media.
  - b MoH previously released new daily case numbers by severity from Category 1 to 5 with the corresponding share of patients vaccinated. Currently, COVIDNOW provides the [share of active cases](#) (rather than new cases) by status (i.e. the percentage of active cases in home quarantine, at quarantine centres, hospitalised and in ICUs). The breakdown of cases by vaccination status is no longer available.
  - c COVIDNOW provides the number of active [hospitalisations](#), [ICU patients](#) and [patients ventilated](#) per state (along with a 7-day average). Some state-level health departments, including those in [Sarawak](#), [Perak](#), [Perlis](#) and [Pahang](#), also provide a breakdown of new cases by severity.
  - d Expressed as a 7-day average on COVIDNOW.
  - e Raw data on all reported deaths up to September 7, 2021 is available on GitHub [here](#). The dataset is a line list that covers the age, vaccination status, type of vaccination received, sex, state, nationality and comorbidities of the reported deaths. However, this data has not been refined or visualised on COVIDNOW and requires cleaning up.
  - f [Monthly data](#) available on COVIDNOW.

## OPEN-UP BASED ON COMPARATIVE RISK AND SCIENCE, NOT BASED ON PUBLIC FEAR MONGERING

Earlier, the issue of sequencing to open up various sectors of the economy was discussed. It is important for the policy makers to make clear the scientific basis of opening up various sectors of the economy (and not opening up others) so that the public can have confidence that the government is making sound decisions. This will also reduce public scepticism that the reopening of certain sectors will lead to the formation of new clusters.

The government should not underestimate the feelings of distrust and discomfort among the public, some of whom may even take out some of their frustrations on those who want to see more economic sectors open up. For example, some may feel deeply disturbed by the reopening of cinemas even though there has been little evidence to demonstrate the emergence of cinema clusters in other countries or even in Malaysia when cinemas were allowed to operate in between the various MCOs.

It cannot be denied that some activities should be considered higher risk than others in terms of possible exposure to COVID-19, such as dining-in for long periods of time without facemasks and in large groups where conversation is flowing. But if the government is able to explain the SOPs which it has / will put in place to minimise such risks following discussion and consultation with the various industry players and stakeholders, then public confidence can be built up over time, even if some cases emerge from some of these activities.

In other words, the government should do what is scientifically sound in terms of its reopening strategy, not simply what is popular. **The government needs to recognise the prevalence of irrational concern among many people and take steps to address these concerns as much as possible.**

Finally, the public also has a part to play in adapting to the evolving conditions. In recognition of the fact that COVID-19 will be here to stay for at least the next few years, if not longer, i.e. it becomes endemic like the flu, **people will have to adjust their behaviour based on their own risk appetites** rather than reprimanding others who choose to go out, provided that proper SOPs are followed at all times.





## OPEN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING AND SECONDARY AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS

One very important area where public concerns and fears have to be addressed in a hands-on and comprehensive manner is in education. **The education sector must be considered an economic sector because of the short- and long-term effects it has on the larger economy.** In the short term, if schools are still not allowed to open, all those people whose livelihoods depend on the education ecosystem, such as bus drivers, canteen operators and kindergarten operators, will not be able to earn a living.

In the long term, those students who have to learn from home will inevitably suffer from poorer grades and perhaps poorer performance as they move from primary to secondary and tertiary education. As it is, [Malaysia's schools have been closed for 48 weeks, among the longest globally](#). The longer students are forced to study from home, the worse the long term impacts will be. Already, [reading proficiency for primary school students globally](#) is not expected to reach pre-COVID levels before 2027 at best or 2031 at worst. Every week counts, and the longer school closures last, the less well prepared Malaysia's workforce will be for the economy of the future.

We anticipate that there will be an announcement to **vaccinate students aged between 12 to 17** at the end of September / early October when the national vaccination program for adults aged 18 and above would have been almost completed. It is unlikely that a significant proportion of students will have been vaccinated when face to face schooling is supposed to start on October 3, 2021 for primary and secondary school

students. In anticipation of this, the Ministry of Education (MOE) should start **preparing parents and building confidence** in them to send their children to school starting from early October. Hopefully by then, the number of serious COVID-19 cases in all of the states will have shown a significant downtrend.

But there are other more **proactive measures to build back confidence in parents for school reopening** including putting in proper SOPs such as the provision of facemasks to all teachers and students, sufficient hand sanitising facilities in every school, allowing only fully vaccinated teachers to teach, allow sufficient physical distancing in all classrooms, as a start. MOE should also seriously consider providing teachers with self-testing kits for use on a daily basis, at least for the first month of the start of face-to-face schooling, to build parents' confidence. SOPs should also be put in place to test those in classes where one or more children are found to be COVID-19 positive, perhaps through infection at home from their parents or siblings. **There should be enough robustness in the SOPs such that an entire school should not have to be shut down because a handful of cases were identified.**

The issue of public confidence is even more necessary for children aged 6 to 11 since it will be quite some time before approval will be granted and for the supply of vaccines to be sufficient to vaccinate all of the children in this age group. Hence, parents will have to live with the presence of COVID-19 in the community (which includes the schooling system). It will require the efforts of all the

stakeholders – the Minister of Education and his Deputies, the top management of MOE, the state and district education officers, the headmasters and teachers, and the parents themselves, to restore confidence back into the schooling system.

For institutions of higher learning, the fact that many of the students live in hostels and dormitories obviously increases the possible exposure and transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Stringent and comprehensive SOPs have to be put in place, especially in the accommodation and public areas in each of the institutions of higher learning, be it the public or the private institutions.

The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) should also facilitate the processing of applications from foreign students wanting to further their studies in Malaysia subject to these students being vaccinated in their home countries and observing the necessary quarantine period once they arrive in Malaysia. **Foreign students are an important driver of the economic sustainability of many private institutions of higher learning and they also provide a boost to domestic consumption.** MOHE should also seriously consider making it mandatory for all those students who want to go back to the physical campus to get fully vaccinated, especially for those who are living in hostels and dormitories.



## ALLOW INTERSTATE TRAVEL AND OPEN UP BORDERS FOR SAFE TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Apart from reopening schools, the only other part of the reopening of the economy that involves a large movement of people is allowing interstate travel to resume. In terms of sequencing, an argument can be made that opening up interstate travel should probably be done at the tail end of the national vaccination programme, when all of the states have had more than 80% of their adult population fully vaccinated. Restrictions can still be put in place to only allow adults who have been fully vaccinated to travel interstate, but it is probably unrealistic to think that there will not be large leakages in terms of travelling by adults who are not fully vaccinated, especially from states with a relatively low share of adults registered to be vaccinated such as Sabah (55.9%) and Kelantan (71.6%) (Both as of 13 September 2021).

**Interstate travel is a necessity for the revival and recovery of the tourism sector** especially since the overseas travel market is likely to remain muted for at least one more year, if not more. Domestic tourism can and will replace some of the lost revenue from foreign tourism especially since borders in other countries remain partially or fully closed to non-business travel.

The tourism sector can have a faster recovery if the government puts in place policies which allow tourists from safe destinations (those with a relatively low number of COVID-19 cases and with a high vaccination rate such as Singapore and China) to visit Malaysia with only minimal quarantine and testing regulations. Even if this arrangement is not reciprocal (i.e. Singapore still requires

Malaysians who are vaccinated to be quarantined for 2 weeks while Malaysia only requires Singaporeans who have been fully vaccinated to only take PCR tests immediately before and after arrival in Malaysia), Malaysia should be prepared to take this offer for the sake of the country's tourism sector. **In terms of sequencing, priority can first be given to business travellers and then to the larger tourist market.**

We should also be **less stringent in processing and allowing Malaysian residents to leave the country** to go to other countries especially those which are considered safe / safer where a large percentage of its residents are fully vaccinated and where the number of serious COVID-19 cases is under control. This will help revive the air travel market including our airlines and also our airports.

Box 1 on the following page describes a three-pronged approach to revive Malaysia's tourism sector based on the OECD's tourism policy responses.



**Box 1: A three-pronged approach to revive the tourism sector<sup>3</sup>*****Step 1: Gradually lift travel restrictions and implement clear SOPs***

The introduction of the [Langkawi travel bubble](#) for fully vaccinated domestic tourists from September 16 onwards serves as a useful pilot case study for the eventual reopening of the tourism sector. If successful, it could act as a **blueprint for the introduction of other travel bubbles** across Malaysia's islands, with Pangkor, Redang, Perhentian and Tioman as potential candidates for future reopenings.

Throughout this process, there must be **regular coordination** between the federal, state and municipal governments as well as industry players to address real-time challenges quickly and effectively. For instance, the Greek Ministry of Tourism has an Open Communication Line involving tourism operators, businesses and market representatives to voice their concerns and propose suitable solutions for tourism to adapt to the new normal.

Beginning with domestic tourists, the bubbles could then be extended to fully vaccinated international tourists from low-risk countries, such as Singapore, New Zealand and China.

***Step 2: Restore travellers' confidence***

For the travel bubbles to promote a revival of the tourism sector, travellers need to be reassured that their safety would be guaranteed at the destination. Therefore, **destination preparedness** is a crucial component within the reopening framework. For one, all residents of the destination in question, especially at tourism-focused establishments, should be fully vaccinated before the implementation of any travel bubbles. Mandated pre-departure testing would also be useful, particularly in the early stages of opening up. In addition, there must be procedures in place to conduct and ramp up testing on site where appropriate to mitigate transmission. Transparent information on destination risk should also be provided to prospective visitors.

***Step 3: Make the tourism sector more resilient and responsive***

As Malaysia prepares for the transition to an endemic COVID-19, the tourism sector needs to follow suit on the back of a more **comprehensive recovery strategy**. In part, destinations should be revitalised in line with demand. For instance, it is likely that natural attractions, such as hiking trails, waterfalls, parks and beaches, have become more attractive to visitors looking to avoid crowded indoor spaces. These destinations should therefore be well-equipped in terms of facilities and services, with considerations for pandemic-proofing (e.g. sanitisation stations, suitably placed tables, etc.) where appropriate.

In addition, there could be a need to upskill and reskill employees working in tourism and ancillary industries to handle the demands of an evolved industry. More thorough support for hard-hit tourism-focused businesses beyond tax exemptions may also be required in the coming months and years.

As an example, the UK has introduced a [Tourism Recovery Plan](#) characterised by a whole of government approach. Key elements of the plan include a Levelling Up Fund to improve regional infrastructure and cultural attractions as well as a voucher scheme to stimulate demand.

Government ministries can also be creative in coming up with new tourism “products” which can bring about positive spillover effects in other related industries. Box 2 below describes a possible “sporting event tourism bubble” to island destinations such as Pulau Langkawi and Pulau Pangkor Laut which can benefit both the tourism sector as well as the sports events sector.

#### **Box 2: Organising sporting events for international and domestic participants in a “tourism and sports bubble”**

We already saw the successful organising of the Olympics and Paralympic games in Tokyo recently with no reported COVID-19 clusters emerging because of international travellers (athletes, officials, media) to Japan. Many cities are opening up for SOP-compliant outdoor sporting events, including the London Marathon, which will be taking place on October 3, 2021 with 50,000 participants running together.

While we do not advocate for mass participation events on such a large scale to be organised in Malaysia in 2021, there are opportunities for us to showcase our ability to organise smaller events in “bubble” island locations like Langkawi, Pangkor, Pangkor Laut, Tioman and Redang (just to name a few). **International travellers who have been fully vaccinated can be allowed to travel** to Langkawi and participate in a triathlon event (the Ironman Triathlon usually takes place in Langkawi on an annual basis) subject to testing negative for consecutive days before the actual event. The travellers can continue to be quarantined on the island bubble for a number of days after the event has finished and then be allowed to travel to the rest of Malaysia once they have tested negative a few days after the completion of the event.

This is a safe and even “fun” way to revive the local tourism market and also to slowly help outdoor sports event organisers to revive their business.

## **EACH MINISTRY MUST SUBMIT AN ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN TO THE NSC AND MKN FOR PUBLIC VIEWING**

The issue of each Ministry putting forth a calendar for the proper sequencing of opening up for the economic activities under their respective jurisdictions was discussed briefly earlier.

In addition to opening up, each Ministry must take the lead in proposing SOPs which can enhance the readiness of these sectors to be COVID-19 proof so that these sectors can bounce back faster because of increased consumer confidence and a decrease in the probability of being shut down again because of any possible increases in the number of serious COVID-19 cases.

In addition, each Ministry must come up with new proposals on how the various sectors under their respective jurisdictions can “build back better, faster, stronger, higher” as part of the COVID-19 economic recovery plan. **The responsibility of economic recovery must not be seen as solely the responsibility of certain Ministries such as the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) only.**






## ISSUE CLEAR SOPS

This point has been raised many times by many industry players over the course of the last 18 months (since March 2020) where many confusing SOPs have been issued and later retracted and then reissued again. Even now, there are some SOPs for the reopening of the economy which still cause some confusion such as the operating capacity of restaurants depending on % of their vaccinated workers. **The more confusing and uncertain the SOPs, the slower will be the economic recovery** as companies and owners take time to figure out the safest way to reopen so that they won't be punished by these confusing SOPs.

For example, in the SOPs issued on September 9, 2021 for Phase 1 states with regard to dining-in, only those workers who are fully vaccinated and without any symptoms are allowed to work. But it also states that restaurants with 40% and 60% and 80% of its workers who are fully vaccinated can operate at 60%, 80% and 100% capacity respectively. It is not clear where the extra 20% of workers at each level will come from since only those who are fully vaccinated can work. (See Figure 2 below)



Figure 2: SOPs for Dining-in for Phase 1 states (as of September 9, 2021)

 <b>PELAN PEMULIHAN NEGARA (PPN) – SOP FASA 1</b> TARIKH KEMAS KINI: 9 SEPTEMBER 2021						
Aktiviti Dibenarkan	Waktu Berkuat Kuasa	Seperti ditetapkan dalam penerangan ringkas	Waktu Aktiviti Dibenarkan	Seperti ditetapkan dalam penerangan ringkas	Pergerakan	Bersyarat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sektor Perkhidmatan Perlu yang dibenarkan.</li> <li>Membeli atau mendapatkan barang keperluan.</li> <li>Mendapatkan rawatan kesihatan dan perubatan.</li> <li>Menjalankan urusan Rasmi Kerajaan.</li> </ul>	<b>AKTIVITI DAN PROTOKOL</b> <b>KEMUDAHAN KEPADA PENERIMA VAKSINASI LENGKAP</b>					
Aktiviti Tidak Dibenarkan	Aktiviti					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pergerakan rentas daerah dalam kawasan PPN dan rentas negeri lain tanpa kebenaran PDRM.</li> <li>Pergerakan keluar dan masuk kawasan PPN tanpa kebenaran PDRM.</li> <li>Sila rujuk Senarai Aktiviti Yang Tidak Dibenarkan.</li> </ul>	Penerangan Ringkas					
Arahan Tetap	<b>12. Dine-in</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pengusaha restoran termasuk di hotel, rumah kelab sukan dan rekreasi, kedai makan, gerai makan, kenderaan bersaji, penjaja tepi jalan, penjaja beredar, medan selera, pusat penjaja, gerai makan tepi jalan dan kiosk <b>dibenarkan</b> menyediakan perkhidmatan <i>dine-in</i> dengan mematuhi syarat berikut:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hanya menerima pelanggan yang telah lengkap divaksin dan tidak bergejala</li> <li>Pemilik premis perniagaan MESTI memaparkan notis penerimaan pelanggan yang telah lengkap divaksin dan tidak bergejala sahaja di pintu masuk premis.</li> <li>Pekerja yang telah menerima vaksin dos lengkap dan tidak bergejala sahaja dibenarkan bekerja dengan kadar vaksinasi berikut:                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) 40% : Dibenarkan beroperasi dengan kapasiti 60% pekerja.</li> <li>(b) 60% : Dibenarkan beroperasi dengan kapasiti 80% pekerja.</li> <li>(c) 80% : Dibenarkan beroperasi dengan kapasiti 100% pekerja.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Pemilik premis perniagaan perlu memastikan susun atur meja mengikut penjarakan dan premis mempunyai sistem pengudaraan (<i>ventilation</i>) yang baik.</li> <li>Aktiviti <i>dine-in</i> dengan kapasiti 50% setiap meja dan penjarakan fizikal sekurang-kurangnya 1 meter tertakluk kepada SOP KPDNHEP PPN Fasa 1 - Perdagangan Penderaan.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Bagi individu yang telah menerima vaksinasi lengkap <b>dibenarkan</b> membawa anak-anak berusia 17 tahun dan ke bawah untuk <i>dine-in</i> di premis tersebut dengan mematuhi protokol kesihatan umum.</li> </ul>					

## ONCE WE OPEN UP, WE NEED TO DO WHATEVER IT TAKES NOT TO CLOSE DOWN THE ECONOMY AGAIN

This is where we need a national testing strategy that outlines testing programmes for different industries and category of workers within these industries. Using the framework from the good work done by the experts behind the [Greater Klang Valley Special Taskforce report](#) to keep the COVID-19 numbers relatively low, we must put in a track and trace system which is efficient and comprehensive and deal with the outbreak of COVID-19 with as little disruption as possible.

**Any lockdowns should be targeted lockdowns only and the economy should be allowed to continue with minimal disruptions.** This also applies to all schools: in fact in many countries schools at all levels are the last to close in case a new lockdown is required.

At the same time the opportunity for larger reforms should not be forgotten, such as the **need to reduce our reliance on foreign workers** and **improve the housing conditions for the foreign workers** who are already in the country.

The more we plan to open up safely, the higher the likelihood that we can remain open and open up even more in the future.



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## I ENDNOTES

[1] It was announced by the Prime Minister on September 7 that cinemas would reopen at 50% capacity and music venues and comedy clubs would open at 30% capacity for the fully vaccinated on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September even in Phase 1 states.

[2] See <https://pelanpemulihannegara.gov.my/> for the latest Phase which each state is at and also the economic activities allowed under each stage of the NRP.

[3] Adapted from <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/tourism-policy-responses-to-the-coronavirus-covid-19-6466aa20/>

## **ABOUT REFSA**

Research for Social Advancement (REFSA) is a progressive, non-profit think tank that promotes social advancement in Malaysia. Since its inception, REFSA has been at the forefront of policy discussions and debates in the important political and socio-economic issues of the nation. Today, our aspiration hasn't changed - we want to power the movement for a just, inclusive and multi-ethnic society.

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## **REFSA BRIEF**

REFSA Brief is a series of briefs and opinion pieces that aim to analyse pertinent socio-economic issues and encourage discussions in policy issues across the public, private and the third sector.

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