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Nearly 70 pct of workforce back at work as of May 17 – Tengku Zafrul

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KUALA LUMPUR, June 2 – Some 10.25 million people, or 67.2 per cent of the workforce, had returned to work as of May 17, up from 6.64 million people or 43.6 per cent a week earlier (May 10), said Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz.

Citing data from the Statistics Department, he said these figures took into account those working from home and covered various economic sectors such as services, agriculture, manufacturing, and mining and quarrying.

“The increase in the number of employees returning to work shows that the opening of the economy on May 4 by the government has thus far been smooth to enable workers to earn their livelihood,” he said when presenting the 7th Laksana-Prihatin accomplishment report today.

On the issue of saving jobs, Tengku Zafrul said based on the Statistics Department’s report dated May 29, the country’s unemployment rate for the first quarter (Q1) was 3.5 per cent. This was the highest since the second quarter of 2017.

“Given the serious impact of COVID-19 on most countries’ economies, Malaysia’s increase in unemployment is still under control, compared to 3.3 per cent in the previous quarter,” he said.

In comparison, Tengku Zafrul said, the Q1 unemployment rate in the Philippines was 5.3 per cent (increasing from 4.5 per cent in the previous quarter), while Spain saw 14.41 per cent (up from 13.78 per cent in the previous quarter) and New Zealand 4.2 per cent (rising from 4.0 per cent in the previous quarter).

“This shows that COVID-19 affects jobs globally,” he said.

Meanwhile, the finance minister said based on feedback, the government found that the situation faced by the public and businesses was very challenging.

He noted that four out of 10 Malaysian jobs were related to the tourism industry, which is among the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

He also said that the higher education industry, which is worth RM35 billion to the nation's economy, would be facing major challenges in attracting international students.

“While 67 per cent of workers have returned to work, there are about five million workers in various sectors who have not started work. This is due to, among others, because, among others, these sectors being part of the list of industries prohibited under the strict Standard Operating Procedures for health and safety considerations,” he said.

Citing a study by Ipsos, Tengku Zafrul said it showed that 62 per cent of Malaysians were very concerned about the threat of COVID-19 to themselves.

“The percentage is the highest among citizens of countries surveyed,” he said.

He stressed that the government was sensitive to the challenges faced by the workers and the people.

“The government does not take for granted the lives and livelihood of the people or the state of the economy,” he said, adding that the PRIHATIN package was a manifestation of the efforts taken by the government for the sake of the people and country.

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