

■ PANDEMIC

Tricky balancing act for country

Stick to the rules or it's back to full lockdown, says minister

LOYISO SIDIMBA and LETHU NXUMALO

CO-OPERATIVE Governance and Traditional Affairs Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma has warned South Africans not to break the relaxed national lockdown regulations, or they would face even stricter measures.

Dlamini Zuma and her Trade, Industry and Competition counterpart, Ebrahim Patel, yesterday announced measures that will come into effect on Friday, as part of easing the lockdown and reopening the economy as announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa this week.

"This is in our hands, all of us, collectively and individually," said Dlamini Zuma. To ease the lockdown, which was implemented four weeks ago to fight the Covid-19 pandemic, the government has adopted what it calls the risk-adjusted approach.

This approach takes into account the advice of the ministerial advisory committee, headed by epidemiologist and infectious diseases specialist Professor Salim Abdool Karim, who says the high-point of the virus spread is expected to be in September.

Dlamini Zuma said the risk-adjusted approach was developed by the health and economic cluster departments, and incorporated input from business organisations, political parties, unions and commentators.

This approach will have three different systems, with the first having five alert levels.

Ramaphosa announced on Thursday that the country was under level 5 of the lockdown, which is a full lockdown, but this would be eased from Friday next week. However, strict regulations will apply.

Dlamini Zuma said if South Africans wanted to go to lower levels of the lockdown and return to normality then everyone must make the necessary sacrifices and rise to the collective challenge.

"Let us stick to the rules and don't be like others who want to beat the system," she warned.

According to Dlamini Zuma, some rogue elements had tried to bypass the national lockdown restrictions on movement across provinces by carrying empty coffins – mourners

are allowed to travel across provincial boundaries on condition they have the required documentation.

"This is not the time to try and beat the system, this is the time to work together," she said, adding that if regulations were not followed the country would revert to level 5 or even stricter measures.

From Friday, it will be mandatory for anyone leaving their home to wear a cloth mask.

She said the government's aim was to stop the spread of the disease.

Companies in the various sectors that will be allowed to gradually open from Friday have also been warned to adhere to all health regulations.

Dlamini Zuma said all industries must abide by the guidelines and ensure that employees were screened for higher-than-normal temperature and other coronavirus symptoms.

Mass testing will have to be carried out at businesses that employ more than 500 workers.

Patel said the government's approach involved a difficult and complex process and was also a tricky balancing act.

He said this was needed in preparation for the period in which Covid-19 transmission would peak.

Friday's phased reopening of the economy should allow 1.5 million workers to return to work, more than 40% of the country's workforce.

As various sectors of local business gear up for the implementation of Level 4, a plan has been put in place in KwaZulu-Natal to ensure businesses remain afloat during these times.

Provincial role players in various sectors have teamed up with the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (Edtea) to establish Usizo KZN (Help KZN), a programme to help businesses

Usizo is backed by the Durban Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Pietermaritzburg and Midlands Chamber of Commerce, eThekweni Metro, Trade and Investment KwaZulu-Natal (TIKZN), InvestDurban and the KwaZulu-Natal Business Chambers Council.

Continued on Page 2

■ PANDEMIC

'Support systems not working'

From page 1

Through the programme, informal traders, small and big businesses will receive pro bono business expertise, financial assistance, legal advice as well as mentorship.

Melanie Veness, the chief executive of the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Business, said the economic reality was dire and the support mechanisms that had been put in place were not working.

"The systems are overwhelmed. Payments that should be coming in to support small and big business are not coming in.

"We are doing what we can to help our businesses repurpose so that they can cater to the needs out there at the moment, but it is difficult to do this under lockdown conditions," she said.

"I am concerned about the manufacturing sector because prior to lockdown a number of businesses were already on shaky ground."

Nigel Ward, president of the Durban Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said they were engaging with Ramaphosa's risk-adjusted approach to reopen the economy.

He said the chamber needed to determine how business could work hand-in-hand with the government to ensure a smooth transition back to economic activity and productivity to secure social stability.

"Reopening the economy during this phase of the pandemic is a complex process with different implications for regional communities and our various industry sectors," he said.

"We believe that SMMEs, spaza shops and informal businesses will be the worst affected by Covid-19 given that many are reliant on monthly income to sustain operations, with no access to additional capital."

From tomorrow, several Cabinet ministers will brief the nation on the guidelines to be followed on the reopening of schools and universities, and various sectors of the economy.

Level 4 lockdown regulations would then be published.