

Govt cracks down on fake virus news

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The government is following through on its threats to punish anyone who spreads fake news about the Covid-19 pandemic.

The authorities are cracking down on misinformation and any person who publishes or makes a misleading statement through any form of media about Covid-19 will be criminalised, according to the amended State of Emergency Covid-19 Regulations.

This also includes any statement intended to deceive any other person about the Covid-19 status of any person or measures to combat, prevent and suppress the virus as outlined in the regulations.

“We should not allow a situation whereby people might be tempted to spread

misinformation or incorrect information in the public under the circumstances,” attorney general Festus Mbandeka said at the weekend. Asked if it will be difficult to prove if a person had intention to spread fake news, justice minister Yvonne Dausab said the normal rules of evidence would apply and authorities have to determine whether or not

someone should be held liable or not for distribution of fake news.

Government has imposed a national lockdown until 4 May this year in an attempt to curb the spread of Covid-19.

The authorities have in the meantime relaxed some of the regulations pertaining to the lockdown period, with street vendors now given a chance to operate under strict conditions. According to Dausab, in the amended regulations, an informal trader will be allowed to trade if they sell essential goods or provides critical services.

"We opened up that space so that you are now able to buy tomatoes at the guy that sits in the corner in the location. You don't have to walk to Shoprite and Woermann Brock to purchase onions and tomatoes... so that gentleman at the street corner becomes a critical service provider," stated Dausab. Mbandeka added in terms of opening up the markets, they looked at various economic activities that would be opened up without risking the lives of Namibians. He also said health protocols have been put in place for food businesses and consumers to maintain good hygiene as well as practicing social distance. A City of Windhoek notice at the weekend indicated that they will only permit vendors to sell fresh vegetables and fruits, raw meat, fish and dried foods at the open markets during the national lockdown. Dairy products, poultry, cereal and flour products and cooked food, which should be prepared at home, will also be sold. Trading hours will be between 08h00 and 17h00 daily. The notice indicated, customers are only allowed to 'pick and go' and will not be allowed to hang around the market.

Hard liquor banned

Meanwhile, government has allowed for the sale of liquor containing less than 3% of alcohol volume. However, alcohol, which contains more than 3%, will not be sold during the lockdown. This includes tombo or any other fermented, distilled, spirituous or malted drink, traditional or non-traditional. -sikela@nepc.com.na

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