

## **LETTER | An open letter to the Health DG**

**Malaysiakini**

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LETTER | Dear sir, when I first heard you reporting the Covid-19 statistics and death toll as well as expressing your condolences to the families of covid victims, you sounded professional, confident, and most of all, compassionate, as someone who understands the common man's fears of an unknown threat to his health. At that instance, I thought, the people of this country are in safe hands with you as the director-general of Health, and I placed my faith in you to steer the country out of the pandemic.

Seventeen months later, following the second wave of the pandemic, which has led to the third, amidst MCO 3.0 followed by EMCO, the Covid-19 crisis appears to have taken a ferocious turn, logging 9,353 cases on day eight, 9,105 on day nine, 8,574 on day 10 and and 11,079 on day 11 of EMCO, throwing Covid-19 treatment facilities into a state of paralysis. Pictures appearing on social media depict a state of mayhem, like scenes out of "disaster movies" and I wonder what has gone wrong since the initial days of the pandemic in Malaysia. It appears now

that we had managed it better than we are doing now, which is ironic.

It is ironic that the virus was contained, albeit temporarily, when knowledge about the virus was still limited. MCO 1.0 and the ensuing CMCO and RMC0 phases were a straight road to curbing the rate of infectivity until the Sabah state election caused a resurgence in the number of cases, which has led to the state of the Covid-19 crisis today.

I am wondering, sir, why even after 17 months, we find ourselves at a loss as to handling the severity of the present-day crisis? Did we not foresee a possible second, third, and subsequent waves of the pandemic? Didn't your team of health experts foresee subsequent waves after the first? Why are we facing issues of insufficient resources - manpower, space, and equipment? Don't we have a crisis management mechanism in place to deal with a possible spike in the infectivity rate and number of positive cases? Do the chiefs of departments and units need to obtain approval from their superiors and wait for the nod from all the way up the chain of command in your ministry under the present circumstances to equip the facilities they manage for covid management purposes?

I am saddened by the news on the choices doctors had to make in handling critical Covid-19 cases and I am saddened at how thinly their endurance is stretched to help save lives despite the severe limitations in resources.

I do not understand sir, why major hospitals in Selangor are still handling the Covid-19 assessment centres, the public vaccination centres, mobile outreach transportation of patients; core business as usual with a colossal added responsibility - managing the Covid-19 surge.

Was there no projection of possible increased number of cases and the infectivity rate post Hari Raya Aidilfitri as a preparation to face a possible crisis as it is at present? No workable strategy was identified or devised to fight if the pandemic took a monstrous turn, was there sir?

Another issue that baffles me is that both the Science, Innovation and Technology Ministry (Mosti) and the Health Ministry (MOH) are dealing with vaccination. Wouldn't it have been better, sir, if only Mosti handled the vaccination programme, leaving the hospitals to manage Covid-19 patient care, which is the core of their duties?

What is obvious up to now is that the essential human capital of MOH has been scattered, stretched, and strained from having to manage much more than focused and prioritised Covid-19 patient care. Perhaps, privatising the vaccination programme is another possible solution to reducing the overwhelming workload that the hospital staff are dealing with. There are numerous private medical entities that would only be glad to take on this

responsibility.

I, as would any other concerned Malaysian, am pleading for a restructuring and reorganisation of the human resources of MOH for effective Covid-19 management, streamlining the process of tracing, screening, segregating, and treating to eliminate overlaps and wastage of time. Time is of the essence in this context, sir, as I believe you already know. A reduction in the red-tape and procedures for procurement of equipment and manpower, maximising the MOH expertise in fighting the virus and utilising the non-human resources to provide the best care for Covid-19 patients and to end the crisis without losing any more lives.

The next issue that I would like to draw your attention to is the futility of the current lockdown, which has obviously failed in curbing the spread of the coronavirus. While the EMCO is in place, Miti has been actively issuing approval letters for factories and construction sites to be opened and operated.

The latest I hear is that shopping malls have obtained approval for operation in Kuala Lumpur. Many of the new clusters involved workplaces and they involved foreign labourers. Throwing in terms such as “sporadic infection” does not do much in allaying the fears of a lay person like me.

The point is, sir, infectivity rate is on a rapid rise and allowing businesses to operate is not helping the situation. People are traveling to work in hordes, and people gathering in closed, confined spaces is conducive for infection to take place. If businesses were to operate and people were to return to work in masses, why then, sir, do we have the lockdown that keeps only a fraction of the workforce at home, controls their movement with ridiculous SOP such as single occupant vehicles and no jogging, walking, cycling?

I would like to stress here, sir, working from home is not a walk in the park for many of us. I have been working from home since MCO 1.0 and the little joys, like my daily morning walk that made a world of difference to my mental health, until the current EMCO stole it from me. Spending an hour outdoors and the fresh air alone were sufficient to keep my mind healthy, but now, I hate staying indoors, the concrete walls around me seem to be closing in on me and I can feel the strain in my emotions.

I crave for the outdoors, the birds chirping merrily, the shimmering surface of the small body of water I walk past every morning. I walk alone, sir. It used to be my “me time”, time away from other human beings, time to reflect on happy memories, time to plan, time to simply empty the mind of worldly concerns. So, there really is no such danger to my spreading of the virus.

I am not going to plead for an exemption to the insensible SOP, sir. Instead, I request for the lockdown to be lifted immediately so that everyone can feel the same amount of freedom, just like the VVIPs who have been actively gathering for their political survival and durian parties without having to face the music, like the factory workers and owners, mall operators and employees. Please lift the lockdown and have vaccination drives at the factories and business premises; registered as well as walk-in vaccination options. Business owners should pay for their employees' vaccination, especially for foreign workers. Cheap labour comes with some extra costs and business owners should willingly pay for it. Please also increase vaccination opportunities for Malaysians so that herd immunity can be achieved sooner as the Mosti chief has mentioned that vaccination is slow in Klang Valley.

Once again Sir, I am placing my faith in you to address the shortcomings in Covid-19 management system. My sincere apologies for taking up your time, sir. I thank you for your efforts and I'm hoping for this crisis to end soon so that we can all return to at least half of what "normal" used to be.

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