

PM PROVES HIS METTLE IN VIRUS CRISIS

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Muhyiddin shoulders responsibility of leading country through pandemic and economic crisis

KUALA LUMPUR

TODAY marks Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's first 100 days in office as prime minister after taking the reins of the nation's administration on March 1 and shouldering the heavy responsibility of leading the country through the Covid-19 pandemic and economic crisis.

It was clear from the start that Muhyiddin had his work cut out for him as Covid-19 cases in the country then were showing signs of an upward swing.

Various initiatives were announced by Muhyiddin in his first 100 days. These initiatives were introduced to tackle the health, economic and social challenges brought about by the global pandemic and the fall in world crude oil prices.

Muhyiddin faced his litmus test when he introduced the Movement Control Order (MCO) on March 18 to contain the pandemic. It was touted by many as an unpopular but courageous move.

In an interview with Bernama, Health director-general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah, among the top-level frontliners battling the pandemic, described the MCO as a move that was enforced at a time when the nation was ill-equipped, with no vaccine or effective drugs to treat patients.

"The Health Ministry discussed the Covid-19 situation with Tan Sri (Muhyiddin) and I was impressed as he bravely decided to go ahead with the MCO when many nations, barring China, were not ready to commit to restriction measures," he said.

"The MCO also meant that we needed to enforce Act 342 (Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988), a piece of legislation never used before in Malaysian history.

"We supported the move. It was the best solution and there is no right or wrong (when it comes to such matters) as no other country has done it.

"As the saying goes, this was uncharted territory, and this was courage.

"Fast forward, we have now seen how the MCO has flattened the Covid-19 curve, while many neighbouring countries have also followed suit (by introducing restriction measures).

"This shows that Malaysia is at the forefront in using a method that has never been used in other nations, especially in Asia."

Dr Noor Hisham said Muhyiddin's steadfast belief in the capabilities of the public service workforce to combat Covid-19 was also admirable.

The MCO included a comprehensive ban on public movements and gatherings in the country, including religious, sports, social and cultural activities.

Malaysians were also banned from travelling overseas and for those who were returning from overseas, they were required to undergo health screenings and voluntary quarantine for 14 days.

The MCO also saw an entry ban on foreign tourists and visitors to Malaysia and the implementation of tighter border controls.

Malaysia's global collaboration to accelerate work on the development of a vaccine was spearheaded by the prime minister after he joined several world leaders on April 24 at the launch of the Access to Covid-19 Tools accelerator hosted by the World Health Organisation via a live teleconference, where he offered Malaysia's full support for the international effort.

"Malaysia is fully committed to being part of this time-bound effort and to take on the manufacturing of some of these tools and vaccines as they become available.

"And I urge leaders across the globe, donors, the private sector and the scientific community to support this important effort to win this war against Covid-19," Muhyiddin said in his remarks during the teleconference.

To weather the effects of the

pandemic, on March 27, Muhyiddin announced a RM250 billion Prihatin economic stimulus package with the objective of protecting the people, supporting businesses and strengthening the economy.

The package included a RM1 billion injection for the Health Ministry to purchase equipment, hire medical experts and provide special allowances of between RM400 and RM600 to healthcare and medical workers, and another RM200 for uniformed personnel.

Dr Noor Hisham said the Prihatin package and Conditional MCO were wise decisions.

"We are now in the recovery stage, where we are able to contain the outbreak and at the same time reboot our economic sectors."