

# PM: I AM OPEN TO IDEAS, ADVICE

**T**HANK you for your open letter to me dated Jan 7 (“10 steps to avoid us going into Covid-19 intensive care”). Let me express my appreciation that such an august group of professionals has provided proposals, ideas and opinions related to the management of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As you may be aware, on Dec 15, I welcomed five external health experts, all signatories to your letter, to share their views and advice in a meeting with senior ministers and government officials, with participation from the Health Ministry, Finance Ministry, International Trade and Industry Ministry, and Bank Negara Malaysia.

Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah was able to respond and confirm that many of the concerns raised and proposals made had been or were in the process of being addressed.

With respect to testing approaches, since June, the Health Ministry has been using the RTK-Ag test as a screening test in the community.

The RTK-Ag tests were evaluated by the National Public Health Laboratory and the Institute of Medical Research to ensure compliance with the standards required, and they were later approved by the Medical Device Authority for wider use.

In line with World Health Organisation guidelines, the RTK-Ag tests have been used to confirm results when the



*The Health Ministry has worked with Socso to conduct mass testing using the RTK-Ag test. BERNAMA PIC*

prevalence of Covid-19 was high in certain areas or populations.

In view of the Covid-19 outbreak among foreign workers, the Health Ministry has worked with the Social Security Organisation to conduct mass testing using the RTK-Ag tests.

Up to Jan 13, 146,083 RTK-Ag tests have been done for foreign workers with a two per cent positivity rate and subsequent isolation.

The laboratory capacity has been increased to an average of 60,000

tests per day with the participation of private laboratories under strict monitoring by the ministry.

The ministry's labs routinely conduct testing to identify new variants of Covid-19 strains in Malaysia, enabling the ministry to improve its management strategies.

Recently, the ministry announced that all suitable Category 1 and 2 patients who are not high risk can self-isolate and be monitored at home after a risk assessment is done.

Decanting patients to private hospitals will reduce the pressure on public hospitals and protect the heavily-burdened healthcare workers there.

For a start, the finance minister, Health D-G and other senior government officials have held a discussion with senior management of private hospitals, owned by government-linked companies, to kick start the decanting initiative.

Recently, the Health D-G held another discussion with the senior management of other private hospitals via video call, and attended by almost 400 participants, to carry out the initiative.

I am touched by the prompt support we received from private hospitals. Thank you for laying out in your letter the importance of an all-of-the-society approach.

I agree that we must continue and, where possible, enhance our efforts to engage with communities, industries, private sector and key components of society.

However, with the increased movement of people and poor compliance with the standard operating procedures, beginning with the Sabah state election, daily cases have increased again, following which a third wave was declared on Sept 20.

The continuing rise in cases forced the government to take more stringent measures, such as the Proclamation

of Emergency by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong under Article 150 of the Federal Constitution, which took effect from Jan 11 to Aug 1.

As we continually consider these issues, I would like to welcome nomination of representatives from the signatories of your letter to meet with the health minister, my special adviser on public health and myself, together with senior officials.

I would be open to listen to your advice and ideas so that we can all contribute to reduce the number of infections and impact on the lives of the rakyat.

I agree to form a Health and Scientific Covid-19 Advisory Group, which will advise the government on matters related to Covid-19 pandemic management, and I urge you to nominate candidates to be members of this group.

Let me also address the final point in your letter. I have called for, and will continue to call for, a collective endeavour.

I will continue to put aside politics, focus on working across society to end this pandemic, and shepherding the country through the difficult recovery that must follow.

I appreciate your desire to support the government on this and look forward to engaging with your representatives accordingly.

**TAN SRI MUHYIDDIN YASSIN**  
Prime minister