

# PM to form Covid-19 advisory panel

## Muhyiddin will meet with professionals to nominate suitable candidates

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**PETALING JAYA:** The Prime Minister has agreed to form a Health and Scientific Covid-19 advisory group, which will advise the government on matters related to pandemic management.

Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin (*pic*) invited professionals, who sent him an open letter on Jan 7, to nominate suitable candidates to be members of this advisory group.

He also welcomed representatives from some of the 46 signatories to meet with him, the Health Minister, as well as other senior officials.

"I will be open to listening to your advice and ideas so that we can all collectively contribute towards reducing the number of infections and the subsequent impact on the lives of the rakyat," he said in response to the letter which proposed 10 critical actions needed to be taken before the pandemic situation reached a critical point in the country.

Muhyiddin assured them that his administration's primary focus was

on managing the nation's response to the pandemic and on mitigating "the stark social and economic consequences".

"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 contain this pandemic and shepherding the country through a difficult recovery that must follow," he said.

Muhyiddin also voiced his appreciation to the group of professionals for giving their ideas and views on managing the contagion.

He noted that on Dec 15, the government welcomed five external health experts, who were also signatories of the open letter, to share their views and advice at a meeting with ministers and government officials.

Muhyiddin said Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah had responded to a number of points raised by the experts and that many of the concerns raised had already been or were



being looked into.

As for Covid-19 screening, he said that since June last year, the Health Ministry (MOH) had been using Rapid Antigen Test Kits (RTK-Ag) as a screening test in the community.

"At that time, we were one of the first few countries in the world that had used the RTK-Ag as a screening test.

"The RTK-Ag test kits were evaluated by the National Public Health Laboratory and the Institute of Medical Research to ensure compliance with the standards required, and later approved by the Medical Device Authority for wider use in the community," he said.

In line with the World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines, he said the RTK-Ag was used as a confirmatory result when the prevalence of Covid-19 was deemed to be high in certain areas, such as Sabah, which had been using the test since Oct 5 last year.

The MOH also set up five RTK-Ag testing centres in Sabah, he added.

"This had facilitated MOH in

managing the outbreak in Sabah," said Muhyiddin.

As of Jan 14, he said 365,740 RTK-Ag tests had been conducted with a positivity rate of 3.75%.

On the contagion among foreign workers, Muhyiddin said MOH had worked with Social Security Organisation (Socso) to conduct mass testing using the RTK-Ag test.

He said that as of Jan 13, 146,083 RTK-Ag tests had been carried out on foreign workers under the Socso screening programme, with 2.0% positivity rate.

Muhyiddin said laboratory capacity had been increased to an average of 60,000 tests daily with the participation of private laboratories using both the RTK-Ag and Polymerase Chain Reaction tests.

"MOH is also researching alternative methods of testing, for example, saliva testing and other new methods available in the market."

He added that the Finance Minister, Dr Noor Hisham and other senior officials also held a discussion with senior management of private hospitals, owned by government-linked companies, to begin the initiative of decanting patients to

private hospitals to help reduce the burden on public hospitals.

On Saturday, Dr Noor Hisham held another discussion with the management of other private hospitals to start implementing the initiative.

Muhyiddin said he was touched by the prompt support from private hospitals.

"We must continue and, where possible, enhance our efforts to engage with the communities, the industries, the private sector and other key components of our society.

"Seeking ways to improve compliance with regulations in force for the greater good of our people remains the key priority of my administration, as does continuing efforts to improve prevention," he said.

With the strategies implemented during the second wave, he said Malaysia managed to flatten the curve.

However, the increased movement of people and poor compliance to the standard operating procedure, beginning with the Sabah election, had increased the number of cases, which brought on a third wave in September last year.