

## **What's the plan after MCO?**

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PETALING JAYA: A former deputy minister and an economist have told Putrajaya to draw up a clear game plan to address the Covid-19 situation in the long term, saying the country cannot afford to keep going through lockdowns.

Dr Lee Boon Chye, the former deputy health minister, and Carmelo Ferlito, CEO of the Center for Market Education, said the lockdowns were costly for businesses, employers and workers.

The nationwide movement control order (MCO) that took effect on May 12 is the third lockdown since April 2020.

Lee said the government needed to speed up the vaccine rollout and boost public health measures like contact tracing and mass testing.

“If we can identify all close contacts, quarantine them within 48 hours and carry out mass testing, we can limit the spread of the virus,” he told FMT. “So we must give the health ministry more resources.

“You could reopen the economy within two weeks if you locked down an area, did the contact tracing, quarantine people within 48 hours and carry out mass testing.”

He said MCOs were costly and inefficient, and believed the government was now too reliant on them.

“We need to have clearer direction as to how we are going to get out of this mess. It’s not good enough to just have an MCO and hope cases will go down.

“We need more proactive measures.”

Ferlito said there appeared to be no exit strategy and claimed that the authorities had underestimated the risk of rising infections after the first two lockdowns.

“We need a clear medical strategy to cope with the possibility of cases rising without having to resort to yet another damaging MCO, which has severe effects on the economy and the livelihood and mental health of the people.”

He said he was not surprised by reports that hospitals and frontliners were at breaking point.

“The question is have we done enough to boost our capacity to treat people? Other countries have invested in temporary hospitals.”

Ferlito said the government could introduce a temporary tax to support Covid-19 measures if funding was an issue.

“This can be transparent and fixed for a maximum of two years with the promise that the government will not implement blanket lockdowns again,” he said.

“I believe businesses will be agreeable to such a tax if they are given the promise that they can operate as normally as possible.”

He added that the government should allow the private sector to procure vaccines and cut red tape to encourage investments in private medical facilities to improve treatment capacities.

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