

No need to press panic button, says virologist

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PETALING JAYA: There is no need to panic and impose extra restrictions on business operations yet, said virologist Prof Emeritus Datuk Dr Lam Sai Kit.

He said the authorities have been able to identify new clusters fast, conduct testing and contact-tracing in real time.

Lam was responding to questions on the need for tighter controls to prevent a new wave of Covid-19 infections.

The Sivagangga cluster caused four areas in Kedah to be put under enhanced movement control order. There were also reports of individuals breaching mandatory self-quarantines and the threat of a new cluster due to the large crowd at the Kuala Lumpur Court Complex on July 28.

The World Health Organisation on Saturday said the effects of the pandemic “will be felt for decades to come”, and that the world must learn to live with the coronavirus using currently available tools.

“The number of new cases daily is below 20 and sometimes even in single digits,” Lam said yesterday. “Some cases are imported with few local transmissions. These are well within the government’s capability to handle.

“Imposing further restrictions on the business sector must be the last resort and not to be taken lightly as we are just recovering from the previous three-month movement restrictions.”

Lam urged the public to play their part as citizens and comply with the government’s new standard operating procedures.

Meanwhile, Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said many employers and employees are not ready for extended work-from-home policies.

"Firstly, there are many internet connectivity issues across the country affecting work-from-home arrangements. Employees also lack equipment such as laptops and designated working spaces in their homes.

"If drastic measures are to be taken, we hope the government will encourage employers who help their employees set up work facilities at home, by providing better tax incentives."

Shamsuddin added that limiting business operation hours would cause consumer confidence to plummet, further damaging the market.

Malaysian Trades Union Congress secretary-general J. Solomon said the Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR) should ensure a safety net for workers if such measures are introduced.

"MOHR must compel employers to ensure that any precautionary measures such as working-from-home do not result in pay cuts or become a ploy to lay off workers."