

TOTAL BAN ON INTERSTATE TRAVEL **DRAWS MIXED REACTIONS**

Some experts hail the move, but others say it is too little, too late

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PUTRAJAYA'S move to put the brakes on interstate travel has drawn mixed reactions from experts.

While some hailed the move as necessary, others said it was "too little, too late" as many have already arrived in their hometowns.

Criminologist Dr P. Sundramoorthy said the move was "brilliant" as some people were taking advantage of the relaxation of rules under the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) although the outbreak was ongoing.

He said the potential compounding effect of the festive season called for drastic measures.

"There will be uneasiness as people are keen to travel and visit, but public health and safety come first."

He said Malaysians often take their chances and misuse trust when given a leeway.

"I know someone who's planning to go from Kedah to Kelantan, claiming that his in-laws from Kelantan, who are with the family now, have an appointment at Universiti Sains Malaysia Hospital. But it sounds like the whole family is going on a road trip."

This was supported by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob's statement earlier saying that 1,300 people had queued up at the Kuantan district police headquarters to apply for permits to return to their hometown and 2,412 people who tried to *balik kampung* were told to turn back.

Dr P. Sundramoorthy, an associate professor with Universiti Sains Malaysia, said this not only burdened enforcement personnel, but also made it difficult for

those with legitimate reasons to travel to make trips across states.

"This is sad because when they get busted, they don't realise that others who have emergencies will suffer and they will blame the system for being too hard on them."

He said many Malaysians fail to realise that the CMCO was not a "free for all" situation and the MCO was still in place, albeit with some relaxations, largely to jumpstart the economy.

Epidemiology and biostatistics expert Dr Malina Osman said banning interstate travel was not going to help as many had already returned to their hometowns.

"It's too late. The writing's on the wall now. We can hope for the best but asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic (people) travelling interstate will spread the virus. New cases and clusters will then spark in green and yellow zones."

Dr Malina, an associate professor with Universiti Putra Malaysia, was drawing on the case of a pregnant woman who tested positive for Covid-19 after travelling from Ampang, a red zone in Selangor, to her village in Kelantan, a green zone, to give birth.

She said strict interstate travel bans should have been enforced from the get-go as Hari Raya was around the corner.

She said those given leeway to travel for emergencies, hospital appointments and urgent affairs should have been made to get letters from clinics stating that they had been screened for Covid-19.

Following that, they should be made to quarantine themselves at home before making the trip.

She said the government's rules had been confusing, as interstate travel was initially allowed.

"There's the advisory stating Hari Raya visits are allowed on the first day of Hari Raya with a maximum of 20 people per house.

"Under CMCO, there are relaxations on some activities, such as exercising. Naturally, people will wonder if *balik kampung* is allowed."

