

'Use technology to stay connected this Raya'

KUALA LUMPUR: It is best for Muslims to celebrate Hari Raya Aidilfitri on a small scale and use technology to stay connected with their loved ones on the auspicious day to curb the spread of Covid-19, say experts.

Psychologist Associate Professor Dr Siti Aisyah Abdul Rahman said the best way for Muslims to embrace the new normal this Hari Raya Aidilfitri was to reflect on the real meaning of the celebration, which symbolised victory for those who had abstained during Ramadan.

"The month of Syawal or Hari Raya Aidilfitri is not only for celebrations, but more to receiving Allah's blessings after a month of abstaining from food and other temptations.

"Families can continue performing *sunnah* (the way of the prophet), such as performing *sunnah* prayers with family members at home, having breakfast together prior to Hari Raya Aidilfitri prayers, performing *takbir* and wearing new clothes on the morning of Hari Raya Aidilfitri despite the implementation of the Conditional Movement Control Order.

"Even though visiting relatives and friends on Hari Raya Aidilfitri is our tradition, we must adhere to the new normal by following social distancing rules. 'Visiting' each other is possible with technology," she told the *New Straits Times*.

Aisyah said as a Muslim, there should be an effort to continue to uphold part of the *syiar* (glory) and adhere to the Health Ministry's standard operating procedures (SOP).

"What has been taught throughout Ramadan should be

continued in the context that we need to take care of ourselves and the people around us."

She was referring to Health director-general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah's proposal that Muslims should celebrate Hari Raya Aidilfitri at home in a closed-door fashion to protect their families from the threat of the coronavirus.

Universiti Putra Malaysia's Social and Development Sciences Department head, Associate Professor Dr Nobaya Ahmad, also had the idea of using technology to connect with family members, to say if visitors were allowed or to extend Hari Raya Aidilfitri greetings.

However, Norbaya felt that exemption should be given to children whose elderly parents were on their own during the festive season as there should be at least one child accompanying them.

"Elderly parents should not be deprived of having family members around them during these times.

"The role of neighbours, as well as village, mosque or surau committees to assist and care for the elderly, poor and vulnerable is important, especially when the children are unable to visit their parents."

She said it was important to educate Malaysians that this year, not celebrating Hari Raya Aidilfitri in their hometowns would be a new experience in itself and a big sacrifice for the nation.

She said there were those who had been experiencing this, such

as frontliners who had to work during the festive season, and this was the new normal that everyone had to experience.

"It is common for Muslims, especially during festive seasons and holidays, to return to their hometowns.

"However, the situation requires Malaysians, especially the Malays, to sacrifice the 'balik kampung' tradition for their own safety.

"It is nothing new for some people like doctors, nurses, the police and members of the armed forces, for example, to sacrifice by not going back to their hometowns during the festive season. Now, all of us have to embrace this new way of celebrating Hari Raya Aidilfitri without the 'kampung' feel."

She stressed that the only safe option for Muslims to celebrate Hari Raya Aidilfitri was for them to do it on a small scale with their loved ones.

She also advised homeowners to educate their guests before allowing them to visit on the first day of Hari Raya Aidilfitri.

"If everyone understands the concept of social distancing and how important it is to avoid large crowds, homeowners will not have to reject visitors who want to celebrate the special day with them.

"Visitors should not feel offended if homeowners do not welcome them into their homes. Urban communities might not feel offended as much as rural communities because people normally come to visit by invi-

tation only.

"For rural communities, visitation restrictions might be considered as something unusual, but it is important that they are well informed of the risks of having a continuous flow of visitors despite assuming that their neighbours are free from the virus."

Norbaya said it was the homeowners' responsibility to keep tabs on the number of people visiting their houses and also avoid any overflow of guests.

"If they must have 20 visitors, then they need a SOP on how to handle the visitors and be responsible for any uncontrolled situation."

She urged Malaysians and Muslims to avoid meeting up in public places where large crowds could be found, such as malls or even mosques.

She said parents should take the opportunity to explain to their children why Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebrations would be different this year.

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak's Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development lecturer, Associate Professor Dr Zaiton Hassan, said to continue the tradition of Hari Raya Aidilfitri, people should instead make appointments before visiting their relatives or friends.

"Visits should be made only if there are no vulnerable groups involved, such as the elderly, people with chronic illnesses and children. People can start exchanging food using delivery riders or via contactless mechanism."

She said Muslims could also focus on performing the six-day *sunnah* fast during the month of Syawal as there were no open houses to attend.



Associate Professor Dr Nobaya Ahmad



Police and soldiers manning a roadblock near the Jawi Toll Plaza in Nibong Tebal, Penang, yesterday.