

Docs welcome gradual reopening

‘Restarting economic sectors but restricting sports, gatherings the right move’

By **ASHLEY TANG**
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: The government’s decision to gradually reopen the economic sectors on a staggered basis is welcomed as it will prevent a second wave of Covid-19 infections, say health experts.

“I realise they (the government) are opening up all economic sectors but are restricting those that require a large number of gatherings and contact sports.

“I think they are doing it right compared to other countries,” Universiti Malaya virologist Prof Dr Sazaly Abu Bakar said.

As Japan and South Korea have experienced a second wave of Covid-19 infections in the country following the lifting of its lockdowns, Dr Sazaly said Malaysia would be able to prevent a similar trajectory as closed environment businesses and entertainment centres remained closed.

“I think we have learnt from their

“
People need to learn to live with the virus until there is a vaccine.

Prof Datuk Dr Lokman Hakim Sulaiman

“mistake. We are doing it cautiously and more pragmatically which is good,” he said.

Dr Sazaly said the government can prevent a second wave of infection by ensuring proper SOP (standard operating procedure) is in place for schoolgoing children as without it, they could be potential carriers of the virus to infect the elderly.

He also said cramped university housing is of concern, as well as hotels and tourist spots that have been allowed to operate as it brings in large gatherings.

Dr Sazaly noted that the country was not ready to reopen its borders to foreigners, but would encourage it for business travellers from low Covid-19 infection countries.

“There must be very strict SOP on allowing foreigners in and the question remains as to who do we want to allow in?

“There is the possibility of countries with low Covid-19 numbers not doing thorough screening and are not reporting the real numbers,” he said.

Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said that the country’s borders are still not opened as he announced the reopening of certain economic sectors in the recovery movement control order (MCO) phase yesterday.

International Medical University public health Prof Datuk Dr Lokman Hakim Sulaiman said based on epidemiology facts and what is known of the virus, the country is ready to reopen its economic sectors and even its borders.

“If it is not (opened), the economic stimulus package that was announced by the Prime Minister will only look pretty on paper, and we will be at high risk of meeting Bloomberg’s prediction that Malaysia will experience an economic recession in the next six months,” he said.

Dr Lokman said people should expect the cases to go up when the country opens up, adding that as long as Malaysians are disciplined and comply with the SOP, cases would not go up drastically.

“People need to learn to live with the virus until there is a vaccine,” he said.

He added that the nation’s health-care system has also been strengthened and should be able to cope with more cases.

Universiti Putra Malaysia medical epidemiologist and biostatistician Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman said there was a need to balance the survival of the economy and public health as well as to consider

the long term impact on children’s education and mental health, although acknowledging that the current Covid-19 situation in the country was safe for the government to open up more economic sectors.

Dr Malina said the country’s new cases among locals showed single digit for the past one to two weeks, while the spike in cases was due to imported and non-citizen cases, adding that even expected clusters from the Hari Raya celebration also was not significant.

She added that to prevent a second wave, people need to maintain the guidelines advised by the Health Ministry.

“We should not treat this recovery MCO as an absolute exit from the outbreak. The recovery MCO means we have to continue life with new norms, even though we can do more outdoor activities compared to the conditional MCO. This should continue until we find a vaccine,” she said.