

'Extension the only option'

Experts: Longer restriction needed to get back on road to recovery

By **CLARISSA CHUNG**

clarissachung@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: The extension of the movement control under Phase One of the National Recovery Plan is necessary for Malaysia to get back on the road to recovery, say health experts.

They said the country had "no choice" while it waited for the vaccination rate in the country to ramp up and start having an effect on transmissions.

Universiti Putra Malaysia medical epidemiologist Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman said current restrictions should be continued given that the average number of daily cases continued to hover at around 5,000, with fatalities numbering more than 80 every day.

"Our healthcare system is still under pressure and non-Covid-19 services have still not been running as usual in the past four weeks.

"Moreover, although there is a movement control in effect, in reality we still have many people continuing their routine work on-site.

"These groups continue to contribute to new clusters daily, leading to the high number of positive cases recorded till today.



Hard at work: Medical staff attending to Covid-19 patients at Labuan Nucleus Hospital in Labuan. — Bernama

"Based on these reasons, I believe we have no choice except to continue with the restriction, adhere to the standard operating procedure and wait for vaccinations to have an effect on the disease's transmission," she said.

Various measures by ministries and state governments to expedite

vaccination, especially for employees working on-site, would be a crucial step to stem the emergence of work clusters, she said.

"I hope that vaccination coverage for employees working on-site will be completed soon – not just to control the transmission but also to allow them to earn an income and

continue with their economic activities," added Dr Malina.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia epidemiologist Assoc Prof Dr Azmi Mohd Tamil agreed that the current figures of daily new cases showed that movement controls under Phase One must continue.

"However, the authorities should consider loosening some restrictions to give people breathing space. Otherwise, it may lead to disobedience (of the rules) and a greater number of cases," he said.

Dr Azmi warned that some people might be feeling frustrated with the SOP, especially when enforcement appeared to be applied unequally and haphazardly.

"The good news, however, is that we are making better progress with vaccinations," he said.

However, Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia president Dr Raj Kumar Maharajah said the implementation of movement controls under Phase One must be reviewed for effectiveness.

"The enforcement of the SOP is poor. There seems to be no difference with or without the control. It doesn't make sense to extend it when the impact and results are not what we intended," he said.