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MCO the real solution OR ...

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Dr Mohammad Farhan Rusli says the number of COVID-19 cases in Malaysia shot up because of weak crowding controls, not because of the movement of people - Bernama File Pic

The first movement control order (MCO) that was done in March showed that the country had placed in an effective drastic measure to curb and reduce the number of COVID-19 cases in the country. This was also taken further by imposing strategic Enhanced Movement Control Orders (EMCO) as targeted areas or hotbeds of the virus to contain it from spreading into the larger community. This proved to be a huge success as there was even 0 new cases reported.

After the Sabah State Elections, we saw the now infamous floodgates of climbing new cases that blew up all accross Sabah, and then eventually spread into Peninsular Malaysia. This is where things start to get interesting.

As more cases are reported and the trigger of the Teratai Kluster in Klang, we saw the number shoot to the moon with new cases and the ever growing active cases in the country. This has placed enormous strain not on the health care system, but

more on the healthcare workers. As much as we have great health infrastructure in place, there is only so much the human body and especially the mind can take. With all these and many other factors taken into account, the MCO 2.0 was introduced.

Now it is pertinent to note that in Public Health, there is a great emphasis that must be placed on the balance between life and livelihoods. This is a fundamental aspect as they are components of a larger symbiotic cycle that must go hand in hand. You cannot ignore one or the other. As the Minister of Finance stated that the MCO currently in place costs the country an estimated 600 million ringgit daily and will likely rise, we must look back at the core reason for the spike in cases.

The question one should ponder “Is movement the culprit of virus spread?”. Looking at the accounts, our numbers shot up with movement being the trigger, but the factor that caused it was actually crowding. Not movement but crowding. Crowding during the Sabah state elections, crowding during the infamous Langkawi Beach New Year Party, Crowding in work spaces, Crowding in factories and industries and crowding at social gatherings and events.

Crowding can be categorized into two. Planned and Unplanned. Unplanned crowding are like the beach parties, the overcrowded restaurants, street markets, wet markets or even those triggered by giving out free chicken or cyclists ending up on the same hill converging for photographs. Planned crowding are those like wedding ceremonies, kenduri's, family gatherings and yes cramped work spaces in offices or factories.

Now unplanned crowding can be combatted by a strict law on the converging of peoples. Strict fines and holistic enforcement needs to be conducted. Malaysians have always been a friendly population, but we must ensure that they understand why crowding or gatherings must not take place.

As for Planned Crowding, an enhanced public health measure to tackle this issue that is multi-pronged must be adopted. State governments must work hand and glove with industries and SMEs to facilitate, educate, advocate and empower these groups to be able to manage and limit the spread of the virus in their own premises which will in turn reduce the number or risk of transmission.

These sectors must be encouraged to take part in EPHM and its program and be rewarded rather than punished by total shut down of the business. The relevant Federal Ministries must serve as the catalyst to ensure this rapid adoption where the main objective would be to Prevent Outbreaks at Ignition Sites. Offices may also adopt the new norm strategy to ensure continuity in the daily running of business in the safest way. This cannot be stressed further as this will be the solution that ensures the economic sectors of the country be operating at full capacity to continue the great climb of economic recovery.

With freedom of movement, people will be on the road, using up petrol that adds to the country's coffers. Going to the parks and purchasing drive thru food. Malls and shops will be able to operate at a fixed maximum customer capacity. Hotels may function with closure of their common spaces. More sectors may begin to operate and further fuel our economic recovery.

Moving forward we should start thinking; Do we need a Movement Control Order (MCO) OR do we actually only need a Crowding Control Order (CCO)?