

# A word from the President

## Malaysia at a standstill

Never had I ever imagined a time where the whole country would come to a standstill. Although Malaysia was put on a partial lockdown or Movement Control Order (MCO), it sure felt like we were sent to Alcatraz for two weeks! At the time of writing, 375,458 people globally had been infected with COVID-19 and 16,371 had died from the virus. To date, Malaysia has reached 1,518 cases of infections and 14 have succumbed to the infectious disease. The month of March has been nightmarish, especially for those serving in government hospitals.

Probably the biggest challenge Malaysia is facing is in educating the public on the seriousness of the situation. Around February this year, when the COVID-19 situation was still at its 'infancy' here in Malaysia and despite an overflow of media coverage on the outbreak, mass gatherings were still held. Shopping malls, nightclubs and pubs were still jam-packed in town even as cases soared in China, South Korea and Japan. The warnings were also at our doorstep - Singapore was hit much harder than Malaysia at the time.

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MMA had warned the public through numerous press statements issued on the need to avoid crowds and observe social distancing of at least 1 metre but our calls seemed to have been taken lightly by most Malaysians. In a Star article published on 1 February 2020, I had even told Malaysian Hindu devotees to perform their vows earlier before Thaipusam and avoid crowds in view of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Fast forward to between 27 February - 1 March and a religious gathering of around 16,000 was held in Sri Petaling – a suburb located in KL. Not many Malaysians knew about such a mass gathering. Large numbers of foreigners from a few countries were also reported to have participated. The numbers of confirmed COVID-19 cases surged soon after and most of them were traced back to this gathering. All it took was one single mass gathering and we now have cases in every state of Malaysia.

Since the outbreak, MOH had been working tirelessly on contact tracing with only about half the number of attendees coming forward for tests. I feel for all those serving on the frontlines. Many are working beyond their usual hours with their personal life put on hold. It is my hope that they will be supported with additional personnel and I must mention, sufficient Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

In view of the increasing load at government healthcare facilities, we had also issued press statements suggesting that MO contracts be extended, with even those soon-to-be-retiring given extensions to support the beleaguered frontliners.

We are now heading into the final week of the MCO and many Malaysians are feeling anxious. The PM and the DG has announced that there may be an extension and that

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Malaysia would be likely heading into the mitigation phase.

Recently, another challenge presented itself. A pregnant woman had gone into a hospital for delivery without disclosing vital information. She only admitted her link to the (yes you guessed it) religious gathering in Sri Petaling after giving birth when she started to develop a fever. The whole hospital had to close for disinfection and staff put on quarantine. A similar case had also taken place in Melaka and that hospital was temporarily shut down for two days.

If the people are fearful of disclosing vital information, we are concerned that the

March has indeed been a stressful month and I am almost at a loss for words for the series of events that have unfolded. I pray this nightmare will end soon. But perhaps this can be viewed as a wake-up call for all Malaysians. Health must be made a priority. We also do hope that this will be on the minds of the ministers planning our country's budgets.

Aside from this, we wish to inform all members that as part of a CSR initiative, MMA has donated RM10,000 to Tabung COVID-19 and is contemplating setting up a national health relief fund jointly with MMA Foundation which is tax exempted. We are also in talks with one of the largest online shopping platforms on the setting up the donations so that it can be made by the public. The donations will be entirely used for doctors, nurses and others serving on the frontlines in the battle against COVID-19. To get the ball rolling, MMA will contribute an initial RM25,000 with another RM25,000 coming from the foundation!



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situation may eventually spin out of control. I do believe the expectant woman in Kedah did care about her loved ones and perhaps even the healthcare workers but why did she withhold such vital information?

In efforts to address this problem, MMA issued statements to the media on the serious consequences of withholding important information as contained in Section 12 of the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 where the offender can be punished with a jail term of two years. I wish to also remind all medical practitioners about this act and that all must take it seriously. Do also remind your patients on its seriousness.



Lastly, there has been great concern about the acute shortage of face masks and PPE in the handling of COVID-19. MMA views this seriously and had raised its concerns with the government as well as through press statements issued to the

media. We have asked that healthcare workers, especially frontliners at hospitals and our GPs, be prioritised in the distribution of face masks and will continue to remind the ministries involved on its importance until there is sufficient supply.

To all healthcare workers, please stay safe and God bless!

To all April babies, a Happy Birthday to you and please celebrate the occasion at home if the MCO is not lifted by then. **BMMMA**