

Religions for Peace

The Latest Development of Covid-19 in Malaysia

The first case of Covid-19 in Malaysia was first confirmed on 25 January 2020. Followed by a religious gathering from 27 February to 1 March 2020 with over 16,000 people attending that community transmission in Malaysia became widespread. As of 12 October 2020, Malaysia has reported 16,220 confirmed cases, 5,039 active cases, 11,022 recoveries and 159 deaths. The response to Covid-19 has been governed by ordinary legislation, principally The Prevention and Control of Diseases Act 1988 (“PCDA 1988”). The effect of the PCDA 1988 is to put the Director General of Health in charge. The Director is empowered to create new regulations and offences enforceable with the assistance of the police in response to the threat. Hence, on 20 March 2020, a Movement Control Order (“MCO”) was issued. The enforcement of MCO is to prevent people from leaving their houses except for essential purposes like acquiring food or medicine. MCO order are also to bans public gatherings; closure of most government institutions, educational institutions, and businesses; seals Malaysia’s international border and bans inter-state travel. In areas with a concentrated cluster of Covid-19, an Enhanced MCO applied with stricter limits on movement. Violators are subject to a fine of RM1, 000 or six months imprisonment. The police and the military were brought in to help enforce the MCO.

Presently, daily infections and death rates have dropped sufficiently for the government to downgrade to a Conditional MCO that allows greater movement and for some institutions and businesses to reopen. However, more stringent versions of the MCO remain in areas where infection rates remain undesirable. There is no doubt that the imposed movement control order in Malaysia has caused adverse economic impacts; however, the Malaysia government has been quick to respond by announcing an economic stimulus plan to overcome this difficult period. The behavior changes amongst Malaysian’s as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic are both novel and expected at the same time. Malaysians are shaped by the goals of the individual, whether this is to avoid illness, avoid anxiety or to live by important life values.

Religions for Peace Malaysia (RfPM) through its Multi-Faith Fund cooperated with religious organizations and NGOs to provide and donate face masks, food; to do the counselling and voluntary works, etc. to the needy person. Since many people are working from home, there is an urgent need to make better internet and software applications available for virtual meetings. From the healthcare perspective, tele-medicine will play a greater role. Stable patients needing regular follow-ups, as well as patients in clinical trials, can be directed to tele-health services. These services are used for COVID-19 patients as a form of ‘forward triage’ before they arrive at emergency departments. The COVID-19 crisis has provided an opportunity to improve online education from home. Almost 5 million school students and 1.2 million university students (including about 130,000 international students) in Malaysia have been affected by the closures. Distance learning is not new for Malaysians and can be traced back to the 1990s but times have changed with rapid

advancements in technology and new teaching innovations. Due to COVID-19, online learning is no longer merely an option; however, adopting virtual technologies and ensuring the readiness. In overall, Multi-Faith or religions are seen as a source of information and leadership. Amidst a time of uncertainty, individuals seek out direction by turning to religious consultation. Multi-Faith or religions provide a source of explanation why things are happening, for example why is COVID-19 happening. The idea that everything that happened is part of a higher power's plan is a form of reasoning and coping that an individual can use. The COVID-19 pandemic has a profound effect on all Malaysians as they have to get used to doing activities that are beyond their normal norms. We all do not know when COVID-19 will disappear, but it is the responsibility of all parties to ensure that the virus does not continue to spread.

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