

Mammoth task tracing mosque event participants

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KUALA LUMPUR: Health Ministry personnel have been working around the clock conducting large-scale Covid-19 screenings at Masjid Jamek Sri Petaling here over the last two days, after a participant at an event held from Feb 27 to March 1 tested positive for the virus.

Health director-general Datuk Dr Noor-Hisham Abdullah said the ministry's team had received the full cooperation of all parties, namely the participants, staff and students.

"Our health officers from Lembah Pantai are supported by staff from other states to trace and track all the participants.

"It's a mammoth and daunting task. However, we need to prepare to share the responsibility as everyone can help to protect themselves and their communities," he said in a Facebook post yesterday that was picked up by Bernama.

The urgency of the task became more apparent when the Health Ministry revised its earlier estimate of attendees from 5,000 to some 16,000, with an estimated 14,500 of them Malaysians.

Earlier this week, Dr Noor Hisham had said the estimated number of programme attendees were around 10,000 people, of which half were Malaysians.

Yesterday, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba said the mosque was temporarily closed for disinfection, and urged those who attended the gathering to get tested.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs),



Signs of the times: People about to attend Friday prayers at Masjid Jamek Sri Petaling in Kuala Lumpur.

Datuk Seri Dr Zulkifli Mohamad Al-Bakri, advised those who attended the programme to head to the nearest hospital or clinic.

He said he had an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong before Friday prayers yesterday, and the King also urged those who attended the event to undergo screening.

"Hopefully, Covid-19 will go away and the ray of happiness and the blessings of good health will dock at our shores," said the former Federal Territories Mufti on his Facebook page yesterday.

In a related development, the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais) has imposed a temporary ban on all tabligh (missionary) events in mosques and surau in the

state, based on the Health Ministry's advice.

Mosque and surau administrators in Selangor are not only obeying the Jais directive, but are also taking the initiative to scrap all other group activities as well.

Klang Chinese Muslim Mosque's fundraising committee chairman Sharin Loh Abdullah said all their regular activities had been axed as soon as the directive was issued.

"We have regular fundraising activities in other mosques to go towards building the Klang Chinese Muslim Mosque, but we have stopped such activities for the time being," said Sharin.

"Given the increase in Covid-19 cases, the mosque committee did

not want to take the risk of exposing themselves and the congregation to possible infection."

Klang Indian Muslim Mosque chairman Md Yusoff Noor Mohamed said his committee was strictly adhering to the Jais directive.

"As far as the mosque is concerned, we are following the directive closely, and even our prayer sessions are conducted under close supervision.

He said generally tabligh groups from outside were granted permission to stay in the mosque while conducting their activities, but this had been stopped at the moment.

"With the ban by Jais, we will not be allowing them to come in for activities," he said, adding that the mosque committee had also placed hand sanitisers at all four entry points to the prayer hall.

In a statement on Thursday, Jais director Shahzihan Ahmad said the temporary ban on tabligh was based on the Health Ministry's advice.

The ministry found that six Malaysian Covid-19 cases were linked to the tabligh activity in the Sri Petaling mosque.

"The spread of Covid-19 has somewhat raised uneasiness among the public, and to decrease the risk of infection, Jais has taken steps to halt all tabligh activities in mosques and surau," said Shahzihan.

However, he said activities such as lectures, talks and weddings could still continue with proper supervision and measures.

"I hope that everyone will work together to prevent the infection from spreading through mosques and surau in Selangor," said Shahzihan.