

■ LEVELS

Calls mount for eased lockdown regulations

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MORE formations in the country are piling pressure on President Cyril Ramaphosa to swiftly ease the lockdown and move the country from level 3 to level 2.

The latest pressure comes from the country's two biggest labour federations, which said they backed the reported recommendations from a forum of directors-general (DGs).

The forum reportedly said the opening up should be done under strict enforcement of social distancing, hand sanitisation and the wearing of masks.

Cosatu said yesterday that the call was justified as the country had to save lives while also saving jobs.

The federation's spokesperson, Sizwe Pamla, said the country should now use lessons learnt in the past five months to contain the virus instead of pressing on with the lockdown in its current form.

"We agree with the recommendation for the country to move to level 2. We need to save all the jobs we can, while also saving lives," Pamla said.

SA Federation of Trade Unions general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi said in reality the country had been moved from level 4 to level 2, and the only sectors that remained locked down were tobacco, liquor and international tourism.

"We will back the lifting of the sales of liquor and tobacco. The workers are losing jobs and the government's stimulus package is almost non-existent," Vavi said.

DA leader John Steenhuisen said the time for the country to completely end the hard lockdown had come.

"South Africa's daily Covid-19 infection rate is declining, taking pressure off our public health system. At the same time, our recovery

rate has increased significantly. While this is no reason to drop our guard, it is reason enough to fully open our economy. This must happen immediately. There is general agreement that a second wave is unlikely but not impossible," he said.

However, the chairperson of the ministerial advisory committee on Covid-19, Professor Salim Abdool Karim, said the country needed a few more days before it could decide whether or not to ease its lockdown to a lower level.

Karim said the latest trends in Covid-19 infections and admission to hospitals were promising.

"In the past seven to 10 days, the number of overall new cases has been coming down, but that on its own is not enough because you need to corroborate it with other information," Karim said.

Additionally, Karim said that over the past few months, of every four tests conducted, one was positive, but now only one in five Covid-19 tests conducted was positive.

"So if you look at the evidence... it's a promising trend, but it's too early to make any firm conclusions. We need a few more days. But it's all going in the right direction. I am optimistic that we are now on a downward trend.

"However, I am worried about a second surge. In order to prevent that, people must still practise preventive measures like washing their hands, social distancing and wearing masks. If we don't do that, we risk having a second surge," he said.

By Tuesday, the country had recorded 566 109 cases. Of those, it had recorded 10 751 deaths and 426 125 recoveries.

Cabinet spokesperson Phumla Williams said she was not aware of the reported recommendations by the DGs to move the country from level 3 to level 2.