

# Pressure on Ramaphosa to ease lockdown

SIHLE MAVUSO

PRESSURE is mounting on President Cyril Ramaphosa to swiftly move the country from lockdown level 3 to 2 and open up more economic activity.

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

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

Cosatu told Independent Media yesterday that the call was justified as the country has to save lives while also saving precarious jobs.

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.

General secretary of the SA Federation of Trade Unions Zwelinzima Vavi said in reality the country was moved from level 4 to level 2 and the only sectors that remain locked up are tobacco, liquor and international tourism.

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

DA interim 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, 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 move to a lower lockdown level.

Karim said the latest trends in Covid-19 infections and admission to hospitals were promising. He added that while cases in the past seven days had fallen, information gleaned from that data was not enough to allow the council to formulate a decision.

"In the past seven days 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 collaborate it with other information," Karim said.

Additionally, he said in the past few months, in every four tests conducted, one was positive, but now only one in five conducted were 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.