

EDITORIAL

Lifting bans: a question of balance

LIFTING the ban on cigarettes and alcohol will have to be a carefully measured decision that must factor in the potential health implications not only for citizens but also the health facilities that are already under strain.

The impact on the economy of the ban on sales is evident but government cannot ignore the human cost of lifting the ban.

Professor Salim Abdool Karim, the government's chief adviser on Covid-19, has said that the ban on alcohol sales has eased the burden on trauma units at hospitals.

These front-line staff can focus on fighting the pandemic and there are fears any easing of the ban on alcohol sales will divert their focus.

President Cyril Ramaphosa has pointed out that government's about-turn on the ban on the sale of cigarettes was the collective decision of the National Command Council and not down to Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma.

She has been the subject of a vitriolic attack after reversing previous announcements which said cigarette sales would be allowed during the Level 4 lockdown.

A column in an online publication stated that Dlamini Zuma is the face of social control in the country and bizarrely suggests she is comfortable with people going to underground networks run by organised crime to buy cigarettes, allowing the revenue authority to lose out on taxes.

Now, Ramaphosa and his Command Council have the unenviable task of balancing critical health issues with the pressure to unlock the economy.