

Bersih 2.0 Media Statement (25 November 2020): Irresponsible To Allow Jeffrey Kitingan To Attend Parliament Before Completing 14 Days Compulsory Quarantine

The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih 2.0) questions the government's action to suddenly change the standard operating procedure (SOP) to allow travellers from Sabah to enter the peninsula without the need to undergo mandatory quarantine for 14 days if tested Covid-19 negative (1). This SOP was altered after the violation of mandatory quarantine of 14 days by Datuk Seri Dr Jeffrey Kitingan who participated in the Dewan Rakyat for a budget debate (2) even though he had just returned to Kuala Lumpur from Sabah on 12 November. Earlier on 20 November 2020, the Director General of Health Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham said all individuals from Sabah should be quarantined for 14 days despite being found to be negative (3).

If this SOP is altered simply to allow elected representatives, namely MPs such as Dr Jeffrey Kitingan and Datuk Bung Mokhtar to vote with the hope of approving the 2021 Budget, this action clearly shows an abuse of power by the government regardless of public health and safety. This response is clearly irresponsible if the government is willing to lower the level of public health safeguard solely for political expediency.

Bersih 2.0 believes that in the effort to restore the right of all MPs to debate and vote on a motion in parliament, the government should hold a hybrid parliament session to allow elected representatives who needed to be quarantined to debate and vote virtually. We have already brought up this suggestion last May for the government to conduct virtual parliament sittings (4). In fact, this hybrid session was also conducted by the UK Parliament where some MPs were allowed to sit in the hall while the rest were to be present virtually (5). Unfortunately, the government failed to take up the proposal and it now seems that the SOPs that were supposed to prevent the spread of pandemic outbreaks, have been altered for their own political interests.

Bersih 2.0 urges the government not to arbitrarily change the SOPs solely because there are MPs from their bloc who violated the rules. This clearly shows an abuse of power and the Ministry of Health Malaysia should take legal actions against those politicians who violated the directive without fear or favour.

Issued by:

Bersih 2.0 Steering Committee

- (1) <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/11/24/health-minister-no-more-quarantine-for-sabah-returnees-who-test-negative/1925678>
- (2) <https://www.bernama.com/bm/news.php?id=1904671>
- (3) <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2020/11/756445/covid-19-individu-tiba-dari-sabah-perlu-pakai-gelang-kuarantin-jalani>
- (4) <http://www.bersih.org/bersih-2-0-press-statement18-may-2020-bersih-2-0-offers-itself-to-organise-a-shadow-virtual-parliamentary-sitting/>
- (5) <https://qz.com/1841417/coronavirus-forces-uk-mps-to-use-zoom-in-virtual-parliament/>

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