

Media item

Full Text

'DISALLOW ALL TRAVEL TO MELAKA'

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- Size: 957.00cm²**'DISALLOW ALL TRAVEL TO MELAKA' VEENA BABULAL KUALA LUMPUR**

news@nst.com.my STATE ELECTION Lawyer calls on PM, as NSC chairman, to take steps to avoid recurrence of a Sabah-type Covid-19 wave ALL travel to Melaka from other states should be banned with immediate effect to prevent politicians, campaigners and party workers from converging and causing a new Covid-19 outbreak similar to what happened in Sabah following the by-election last year. Lawyer Mohamed Haniff Khatri Abdulla, who made this call yesterday, also urged Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob to take this step as chairman of the National Security Council to safeguard the well-being of Malaysians. "The prime minister wears two hats — as a person holding public office and a politician. When he is appointed to the role (as chairman of NSC), the former takes precedence. He should make the call and set an example by not entering Melaka throughout this period," he said, adding that Ismail Sabri was the first prime minister in Malaysian history who was not the president of his own party. He said the prime minister also had to give the public the assurance that the Election Commission, the Health Ministry, police and armed forces would be allowed to carry out their duties in any way they see fit, be it in drafting standard operating procedures (SOP) or enforcing them without political interference. Haniff further said that roadblocks should be mounted at all entrances into Melaka from Nov 8 to 20 to prevent legions of campaign workers and politicians from descending on the state, similar to what had happened in Sabah. Mohamed Khatri The Sabah election had led to a third wave of Covid-19 infections that eventually spread nationwide and crippled public health resources. "They should block everyone, save for registered voters and essential service providers, from going in under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 (Act 342)," he said. Campaign chiefs, he said, could send in funds from their party headquarters for expenses to mobilise the resources needed. He also said that there was no need for new laws to cater to the SOP as the Election Commission already possessed wide discretionary powers under the law to come up with its own regulations on conducting polls and nominations as supported by Act 342. Haniff said the Health Ministry and enforcement agencies, such as the police and the armed

forces, should come up with updated SOP to ensure full compliance during the period, stressing that no one else should get involved in the decision-making process. "Those who violate the SOP should face increasing compounds with every additional offence. "On the third occasion that they are caught breaking the rules, they should be hauled to court. "This is the best time for these public departments to show that there's no double standards in the enforcement of SOP and they represent people's interest at best. "This is the time they can show that the mistakes in Sabah will not be repeated. Haniff Abdullah Datuk Dr Bulgiba Mahmud said it was not possible to disqualify candidates for breaching SOP as compounds were not tantamount to a conviction. He also suggested a ban on all face-to-face campaigning, including door-to-door visits and ceramah, as such public events could be done virtually. All forms of group movement and entourage, he said, should be banned especially during the nomination, with only the candidate, nominator and EC officer present to verify the paperwork. "This face-to-face process should be restricted to 30 minutes. Later on, the results should be announced virtually so there is no need for a physical interface on nomination day," he said. On Oct 9, Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin said the ministry was ready with the Melaka polls SOP. The Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry's Covid-19 Epidemiological Analysis and Strategies Task Force chairman, Datuk Dr Awang Bulgiba Awang Mahmud, also said there should be strictly no face-to-face campaigning in Melaka. "Politicians and their followers are less likely to follow face-to-face SOP no matter how strict they are, because cases, hospitalisations and ICU cases appear to be declining and vaccination rates are high," he said. Awang Bulgiba said digital campaigning should be conducted as much as possible. "This was very difficult for Sabah, but should be possible for Melaka given the better Internet penetration in the state." He said campaigners should be restricted to local politicians, with no out-of-state individuals allowed, in order to cap movement from outside the state. However, Malaysian Public Health Physicians Association president Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar said banning interstate travel in Melaka should be deferred until necessary. "Close monitoring of (emerging) cases and clusters in Melaka and the whole country should be conducted concurrently (with the election period). "If there is a spike in cases and clusters, then the authorities can nip it in the bud quickly. "A special task force (for Melaka) similar to how it was implemented in the Greater Klang Valley may also be reactivated to help keep everything under control. "He also suggested that roadblocks be set up at state borders to ensure only those who had completed their vaccination were allowed through. "We also need to restrict or ban public gatherings and functions," he said. Pedestrians wearing face masks crossing the road in Dataran Pahlawan, Melaka, on Wednesday. BERNAMA

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