

Malaysia: Suaram says 'no' to private hospitals commercialising Covid vaccine

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COVID-19 | Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Suaram) has spoken against commercialising Covid-19 vaccines at private hospitals as this would only encourage “queue cutting” that will enrich the wealthy.

In a statement yesterday, the rights group raised concern that this could possibly undermine the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme and weaken social solidarity.

“This also contradicts the principles of giving everyone an equal opportunity in the country’s largest vaccination programme ever,” Suaram said.

The rich and the privileged, it added, should banish any idea that they can use their wealth to buy privilege by jumping the vaccination queue.

Yesterday, the Association of Private Hospitals Malaysia (APHM) proposed that the government allows private health facilities to procure vaccines from different sources to complement the country’s immunisation programme.

APHM president Dr Kuljit Singh said private hospitals strongly felt that the government needed help as the three-stage immunisation programme was expected to end in February next year, and this was too long and not acceptable.

He said the private hospitals were ready to work with the government in vaccinating the people.

Health director-general Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah had previously said that while the government has no intention to commercialise Covid-19 vaccines, it would supply the vaccines to the hospitals, including private hospitals, which would be given to the people for free.

“Suaram noted how the private hospitals at the beginning of the pandemic have been extremely reluctant to offer any assistance in terms of hospital beds or personnel to the government when Malaysia was grappling with the Covid-19 crisis throughout 2020.”

“Their involvement in battling the Covid-19 was only confined to providing limited private beds for a small number of Covid-19 patients. Moreover, even the Covid-19 testing provided by the private hospitals came with an exorbitant cost and the private hospitals are most likely to shift their patients, who are tested positive, to their public counterparts.

“In fact, the role played by the private sector in containing the pandemic has been very minimal.

“Therefore, we have reasons to be sceptical about the sudden change of heart from the private sectors wanting to participate in the vaccination programme, especially when the government’s very

own vaccination has only just begun,” Suaram said.

It believes that the commercialisation of Covid-19 vaccines would only raise the price of vaccines available, thus rendering the vaccines even more inaccessible to the poor or vulnerable.

Suaram urged private hospitals to volunteer their premises as additional vaccination points to speed up the government’s free vaccination programme.

“Allowing private hospitals to make money by vaccinating queue jumpers is not an option,” it stressed.

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