

More than 100 M'sians return from Sulawesi tabligh gathering

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CORONAVIRUS | A total of 107 Malaysians who were among participants of the postponed international tabligh gathering in Gowa, Makassar on Indonesia's Sulawesi island, have since returned in the last five days.

Gowa's administrative head Adnan Purichta Ichsan told Malaysiakini today that there are 20 Malaysians left in quarantine at a hotel in Makassar - after local authorities moved to postpone the gathering of thousands - in precaution against the Covid-19 outbreak.

"All the participants were moved from the gathering location to the quarantine site.

"They will remain in quarantine until the day of their scheduled return (to Malaysia)," Adnan told Malaysiakini, adding that the return date was based on the participants' pre-booked tickets via flight or sea.

As of today, Adnan also confirmed there have been no Covid-19 cases linked to the gathering in Makassar.

"So far until today there have been no reports, so let us pray, God willing it will remain that way," he added.

The final figure of 127 Malaysians in quarantine was higher than initial reports which indicated participation of some 80 Malaysians, excluding those who arrived in Gowa but did not make it to the World Ijtimak Asia Zone 2020.

Ichsan did not provide further details about the Malaysian participants.

However, Malaysiakini understands those who already returned include a group of 12 men who were reportedly intercepted by local marine authorities as they tried to enter Sabah waters off Tawau on Saturday.

According to sources, the group had entered Sabah waters via boat from Nunukan island, North Kalimantan, before being met by state authorities and placed in quarantine at a dormitory in Balung, Tawau.

Their entry into the state was despite a reported order issued by Sabah state secretary Safari Untong for a 14-day entry restriction, effective last Friday, to be

imposed against all Sabahans who attended the ijtimak.

Malaysiakini sighted a Whatsapp message said to be from a Sabah Ports Authority official, believed to have been shared among Sabah's Syura Alami tabligh community, on the morning of their departure.

Among others, it was stated that the Tawau Customs Immigration Quarantine and Security (CIQS) must be opened at the time of their arrival and the group would be subjected to a mandatory 14-day quarantine order.

Aside from the 12 Sabahans, it is so far unclear whether the rest who have returned are being quarantined at other locations in their respective states or placed in self-isolation at home.

Concerns about the Sulawesi tabligh gathering came following a similar gathering in Kuala Lumpur between Feb 27 and March 1, which led to many participants being infected with Covid-19, not only in Malaysia, but also countries within the region.

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