

## **Breaking the rules: How countries deal with ministers breaching Covid-19 SOP**

**Malaysiakini**

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COVID-19 | Since Putrajaya began implementing a wide-ranging standard operating procedure (SOP) against Covid-19, at least two senior government leaders have been caught breaking them.

Deputy Health Ministry Noor Azmi Ghazali was in April fined RM1,000 after attending a luncheon without observing social distancing and more recently, Plantations Industries and Commodities Minister Mohd Khairuddin Aman Razali was also fined RM1,000 for flouting quarantine rules after returning from overseas.

Both ministers have apologised but refused to resign. Khairuddin also pledged to donate four months worth of salary to a Covid-19 relief fund.

But the apologies and gesture have not sat well among critics, who point out that even the quarantine bill of RM2,100 costs more than the fine. Others have

complained that regular citizens are treated more harshly, including given a jail term.

Is too much expected of our government leaders, or have they failed to live up to expectations? Parallels have been drawn with similar incidents in other countries.

In some instances, social media have played a role in putting pressure or outing errant ministers.

But their resignations usually only come after being prompted by the head of government.

### **David Clarke (New Zealand)**

In April, New Zealand's Health Minister David Clarke went against Covid-19 advisory twice while New Zealand was under lockdown by going mountain biking and driving his family to the beach.

Clarke did not immediately resign and instead apologised, calling himself an "idiot" who had demonstrated "poor judgment".

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern decided to demote him but kept him in the cabinet, maintaining that the country needed its health minister during a time of crisis.

However, the country's Health Ministry director-general Ashley Bloomfield outshone Clarke who fumbled in his performance as the health minister.

He became increasingly unpopular with the public and eventually resigned in July.

### **Carlos Kingsley Ahenkorah (Ghana)**

Ghana's Deputy Trade and Industry Ministry Carlos Kingsley Ahenkorah breach was a serious one when he met with constituents after being tested positive for Covid-19.

Ahenkorah was diagnosed with the virus on June 23. He visited a number of voter registration centres on June 30.

He admitted to this in a radio interview on July 2, claiming that he was "very careful" when he visited the centres.

He subsequently courted backlash on social media and was given an ultimatum by Ghana President Nana Akufo-Addo to resign or be dismissed. Ahenkorah resigned on July 3.

### **Wayne Caines and Zane DeSilva (Bermuda)**

Days later, Bermuda's National Security Minister Wayne Caines and Tourism and Transport Minister Zane DeSilva were both outed on social media after videos of a party they attended were circulated.

The party had breached social-distancing rules with guests and dancing in close proximity without face masks.

Bermuda Premier David Burt subsequently accepted the resignation of the two ministers after "inviting" them to resign.

"The events of this weekend seen widely on social media did not represent this government's months of struggle and hard work to keep Bermuda safe.

"Every citizen has been forced to make significant changes in how we live, work and socialise; ministers are no different," Burt said in a statement released on July 6.

## **Dara Calleary (Ireland)**

Developing almost in parallel to Khairuddin's own Covid-19 breach controversy, a golf dinner landed Ireland's Agriculture Minister Dara Calleary in hot water.

The gathering of 80 people at a hotel on Aug 19 came a day after lockdown restrictions were tightened.

Calleary apologised on Twitter a day later but was met with a less than forgiving crowd. He resigned the next day, two days after the incident.

Ireland Taoiseach (prime minister) Mícheál Martin accepted his resignation, calling his action an "error of judgment".

However, not everyone has followed Calleary's footsteps. EU trade commissioner Phil Hogan, who also attended the event, has apologised but refused to resign.

## **Mohd Khairuddin Aman Razali (Malaysia)**

On Aug 18, Seputeh MP Teresa Kok outed Khairuddin, claiming that he had skipped quarantine after returning from Turkey on July 7. He turned up in Parliament on July 13.

Two days later, on Aug 20, Khairuddin stressed he had been tested for Covid-19 thrice after returning but did not address the alleged quarantine violation, asking people to wait for an official statement from the Health Ministry.

On Aug 22, the Health Ministry confirmed Khairuddin had violated quarantine measures and said it had fined him on Aug 7.

An hour later, Khairuddin in a separate statement apologised and announced he would be donating his May to August salary.

However, pressure continued to mount for Khairuddin to be prosecuted amid complaints of double standards.

Today (Aug 24), Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin weighed into the issue, stating that no one is above the law.

He said the authorities would investigate and act in accordance with the law.

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