

Press union rues media outlet that received Covid-19 vaccine while others wait

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While most media practitioners in Peninsular Malaysia are still waiting for their turn to be vaccinated against Covid-19 despite government recognition of being frontliners deserving priority, the media fraternity has been abuzz with word that staff of one media outlet has been vaccinated.

National Union of Journalists Peninsular Malaysia (NUJ) president Farah Marshita Abdul Fatah has expressed regret over the matter, saying that it shows there are "leakages" in the system.

This is because most media outlets and news portals under the NUJ umbrella are still waiting for the government's green light to receive the vaccine.

"While the country struggles with Covid-19 cases that are rising daily, it is appropriate that media practitioners receive the vaccine.

"Media practitioners are already recognised as frontliners, like other uniformed organisations, because their work requires them to be on the field all the time.

"Therefore, NUJ wants the Health Ministry to take the matter seriously and expedite vaccinations for the media," Farah said in a statement yesterday.

She said the union has submitted a list of media practitioners to be prioritised since last March but, to date, has yet to receive a reply from the relevant authorities.

'Latest episode another instance of favouritism'

Another media collective also backed the call to expedite vaccinating media workers, decrying the latest episode as another instance of favouritism.

"If the media had previously faced problems getting equal access to coverage, it is extremely regrettable if the government also plays favouritism with providing vaccines," said Gerakan Media Merdeka in a statement.

Malaysiakini has contacted the Health Ministry for comment on the matter.

Previously, the government acknowledged, on several occasions, that journalists

should get priority as frontliners to be vaccinated against Covid-19.

Most recently, on April 19, National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme Coordinating Minister Khairy Jamaluddin told a press conference that media practitioners are still prioritised in the vaccination programme, but no appointments are currently available.

"At the moment, we are full for the month of April, and this takes into consideration the elderly, those with comorbidities, as well as the disabled community.

"So, we are finding some wiggle space in May to start listing out some members of the media for prioritisation, but I can assure you that once we have enough vaccines - especially in June onwards - we can offer some prioritisation for the members of the media as promised," Khairy said.

Malaysia is currently at the second phase of its vaccination programme that aims to vaccinate 9.4 million elderly people, people with chronic illnesses, people with disabilities and frontliners who haven't been vaccinated during the first phase.

In Sabah and Sarawak, some members of the media have already been vaccinated early in the state's rollout of Phase One vaccination.

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