

Blinken lauds pandemic handling

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US Secretary of State also appreciates Malaysia's vaccine contribution to Covax

PUTRAJAYA: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken commended Malaysia's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic and appreciates the country's contribution of vaccines to Covax, a worldwide vaccine sharing initiative.

He said because of Malaysia's remarkable leadership and success, it even had the capacity to distribute excess vaccines to other countries and even to Covax.

"This is deeply appreciated and evidence of real leadership," he said during a joint press conference with Foreign Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah here yesterday.

He said during the bilateral meeting with Saifuddin earlier, both touched on what could be done together to overcome the current challenges of Covid-19 and build back better for the next pandemic.

"We have to take this moment to strengthen the global health security system. So the next time we are better able to hopefully prevent, detect, and as necessary deal with effectively a new pandemic," Bernama quoted him as saying.

Blinken arrived in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday night for a two-day working visit.

He had earlier stopped in Jakarta, Indonesia.

He said the United States was also working hard on making good its commitment to provide again through Covax, so that these vaccines would be equitably distributed.

"By 2022, the United States expects to donate 1.2 billion vaccines around the world without strings attached, we have a commitment to see what can be done to close the gaps in terms of vaccinations."

On the question of Malaysia and United States working together in vaccine development and distribution, Blinken said he and Saifuddin concurred that producing vaccines



Courtesy call: Blinken during his visit with Ismail Sabri at the Parliament building, Kuala Lumpur. — Bernama

alone would not suffice, ensuring that they get into people's arms was equally important.

He pointed out that many countries face challenges on the logistics, the distribution and literally getting the shots.

One way to do that is to make sure there is a vaccine production capacity in different countries in different parts of the world, including, for example, here in Malaysia.

In addition, the United States has been working to establish an international fund to make sure the

resources exist in real time for countries to take the necessary steps to protect themselves.

"One of the problems we have seen with pandemics of one kind or another is that in crisis, the world gets mobilised.

"And when the crisis is over, we become complacent. And then if there's another crisis, we have to start everything all over again.

"So, one of the reasons for having this international fund is just to make sure countries immediately have the ability to draw on resourc-

es for the necessary protections for the next pandemic.

"It's so important that we collaborate, but I think Malaysia has demonstrated by its own leadership that it's a strong voice for helping the world deal with this pandemic, and hopefully preventing the next one," said Blinken.

Meanwhile, Saifuddin said one area of cooperation with the United States that could be considered is the development of vaccines, possibly through the cooperation between Malaysian and US companies

that produce vaccines.

He said Malaysian pharmaceutical outfit Pharmaniaga Berhad could be the focal point in business-to-business cooperation in producing vaccines.

On another matter, Blinken said Washington would look at additional steps and measures to be taken to pressure Myanmar's regime to put the country back on a democratic trajectory.

He also urged the regime to implement and follow the 5-Point Consensus set and agreed upon by Asean leaders in ending the political crisis in Myanmar, adding that despite these efforts, the situation in the country has continued to worsen.

"I think it is important that in weeks or months ahead, we need to look at what are the additional steps or measures that we can take individually, collectively to pressure the regime to put the country back on a democratic trajectory, including the release of political prisoners, end the violence and (give) access to humanitarian assistance and workers," he said in a joint news conference with Saifuddin.

Separately, Blinken called on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob at his office at the Parliament building in Kuala Lumpur.

The meeting at 2.30pm lasted for about half an hour.

Prior to this, many notable US state secretaries had visited Malaysia, including the most recent being Mike Pompeo in Aug 2018, Rex Tillerson in 2017, Hillary Clinton in 2010 and Condoleezza Rice in 2006.



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