

Dr M: Stop monopoly on vaccine, speed up vaccination Pg. 2 The Malaysian Reserve - 1/6/2021

by AFIQ AZIZ

TUN Dr Mahathir Mohamad urged the government to stop the monopoly of import of vaccines.

Currently, China's Sinovac Biotech Ltd's vaccine is being supplied by Pharmaniaga Bhd, while Pfizer Inc and AstraZeneca plc's vaccines are being imported through the government-to-government agreement.

"The government should stop its monopoly of import of vaccines. Let registered pharmaceutical companies import the vaccines and let them do the vaccination. There are responsible companies which will not cheat. Records should be kept of course. The important thing is to increase the rate of vaccination.

"The need to vaccinate is urgent. Forget politics. You are killing people by being dilatory. You will not be popular for that," he stressed.

Dr Mahathir also revealed that Putrajaya is being bureaucratic to accept the deal of Sputnik V vaccine from Russia's Gamaleya Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology.

The former prime minister (PM) claimed that the Russian agency had been told to answer 400 questions.

"No. It is not the spacecraft. It is the Russian vaccine. It is used in

Russia and in many countries. Germany has approved it. And I believe reputable medical journals have approved it.

"Why is Malaysia not using it? The Russians have offered six million doses. They have been told to answer 400 questions. We want to know if the monkeys have been saved," said Dr Mahathir.

In a press conference yesterday, Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar said the Health Ministry will sign an agreement with Duopharma Biotech Bhd on the procurement of the Sputnik V vaccine, which would also be evaluated by the National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency.

Dr Mahathir also called for the government to use all possible "avenues to speed up the vaccination rate in the country, noting that the increase of Covid-19 cases in "the past few weeks, while only 3% of the population were inoculated.

According to the former PM, the government has the capabilities to increase the inoculation rate, especially with the Emergency power it has.

Dr Mahathir said vaccines must be made accessible to the people, including those who reside in the urban areas without access to



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digitalisation. He believes that in general, the people are ready to be vaccinated.

"But the process is tedious. You have to make online registration. You have to go to the small number of centres for vaccination.

"Old people in the kampung may not have mobile phones, may not know how to register online, may not have good transport, may be unwell, etc. So, if they cannot go to the vaccine centres why not bring the vaccines to them?" said Dr Mahathir, who was once a medical practitioner.

"Vaccination has reduced the number of new cases in the UK, the

US and apparently in China.

"But in Malaysia, so far only 3% of the 32 million people have been vaccinated. It is 40% in the US, a much more populous country," said the two-time PM in his latest posting yesterday.

Dr Mahathir proposed for the government to consider the drive-through vaccination system as what is being practiced in the US.

"I have seen pictures on TV of people driving cars being vaccinated, while still sitting in the driver's seat. It must have speed things up. So, send the teams to the people. Don't wait for them to

come," said the Langkawi MP.

According to the Special Committee on Covid-19 Vaccine Supply portal, 12,117,091 people have registered for the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme (NCIP) and of the total, 1,944,458 have been inoculated.

NCIP had set to achieve 80% of the 32 million population in Malaysia to be immunised against Covid-19.

NCIP Coordinating Minister Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar said more doses of vaccines will arrive in the country this month, which will be distributed to mega vaccination centres and private hospitals to ensure it could reach the people faster.

Dr Mahathir said the process would be much easier as the government has the power to seize property under the Emergency law proclaimed since early January.

"There are properties to be seized for use as a vaccination centre. In Langkawi, we have the huge LIMA exhibition centre and several hotels which are empty. Seize them and add more vaccine centres.

"Malaysia has more public halls than any country in the world. Also, we have more hospitals, public and private, where there would be space to convert to temporary vaccination centres," he added.