

PM admits Sabah election among causes of spike in COVID-19 cases

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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 6 -- Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin today admitted that the Sabah state election was among the causes of the spike in COVID-19 cases in the country over the last few days.

However, he explained that holding of the state election was unavoidable because based on the Constitution, it must be held within 60 days after the dissolution of the Sabah State Legislative Assembly on July 30.

“The Election Commission (EC) had set certain standard operating procedures (SOPs) to ensure the COVID-19 infection would not spread further due to the state election campaign but unfortunately, some SOPs were not adhered to.”

He said this in his special address on the current COVID-19 situation over television and Facebook from his residence, here.

Muhyiddin said he could see non-compliance with the SOPs when he himself was campaigning in the Sabah state election where many people failed to practise physical distancing and were at crowded places although almost all of them were wearing a face mask.

The prime minister said due to the situation at the time, he was forced to do his own SOP including going straight to the stage upon arrival at any programme without passing through the crowd, besides reminding the public to continue complying with the procedure set by the Ministry of Health (MOH).

“I also reminded my officers not to fix my campaign in the red zones. Although I received invitations, I had to politely turn down these. Yes, if possible, I wished to campaign in all the places,” he added.

Muhyiddin said actually, those infected with COVID-19 were already in Sabah at the time and many of the cases originated from illegal immigrants from neighbouring countries and spread the virus to other detainees at the detention centres.

However, he said, early actions were taken by enhancing border control in Sabah with the deployment of additional members of the security forces and assets such as ships and patrol boats to safeguard the country's waters.

"Besides that, a number of districts in Sabah were also declared as Targeted Enhanced Movement Control Order (TEMCO) areas to curb the spread of the virus to other places.

"The government also made it compulsory for those arriving from Sabah to undergo a screening test at the airport. The MOH personnel would assess the risk of each of these individuals and if found positive, they would be isolated and treated at the hospital," he added.

Muhyiddin said that 18,712 people from 13 clusters in Sabah were screened with 1,584 of them found to be positive for COVID-19.

He said as a follow-up action, the identified close contacts of the COVID-19 patients were being traced for them to be screened.

Therefore, he reminded the people not to easily blame or find fault in others following the current spike in COVID-19 cases.

"I know there are people who are purposely taking advantage of the situation now by politicising the problem being faced by the country. We should just ignore them. We must focus on efforts in tackling the pandemic together," he said.

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