

Malaysia govt appoints independent committee to decide when to lift state of emergency

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KUALA LUMPUR - Malaysia on Tuesday (Feb 9) announced a 19-member committee led by a former chief justice to advise the King on when the government proclamation of emergency should end.

The members of the independent committee include three opposition lawmakers.

Malaysia's King, Sultan Abdullah Ahmad Shah, based on advice from Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, in mid-January declared a national state of emergency to allow the government to focus on fighting Covid-19.

Parliament sittings have been suspended and the emergency has allowed the government to rope in private hospitals to provide beds and ventilators for Covid-19 patients.

The controversial declaration is set to continue until Aug 1, but can be lifted earlier if the ruler accepts the advice of the committee that the coronavirus pandemic is under control.

Tan Sri Muhyiddin has indicated that a general election will be held once the Covid-19 pandemic is over.

Opposition lawmakers led by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim have been agitating for the King to remove the emergency so that a Parliament sitting can be held to test PM Muhyiddin's political support, as well as discuss the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis.

Covid-19 cases have numbered mostly above 3,000 cases a day in the last five weeks, and reached a record high of 5,728 cases on Jan 30.

On Monday, Malaysia logged 24 Covid-19 fatalities, its highest single-day number of deaths since the virus was tracked from January last year.

On Tuesday, the daily cases totalled 2,764 - the first time the tally was below 3,000 a day since Jan 13 this year.

The independent committee is led by former chief justice Tun Arifin Zakaria, who will serve as chairman.

The three opposition MPs in the committee are Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail from Parti Keadilan Rakyat, Mr Anthony Loke from the Democratic Action Party, and Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad from Parti Amanah Negara.

The committee's other members comprise former chief secretary to the government Samsudin Osman, former police chief Norian Mai and former Armed Forces chief Zulkifli Zainal Abidin.

Also members are Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia president Ter Leong Yap, Cyberjaya University pro-chancellor R. Palan and Perlis mufti Asri Zainul Abidin.

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