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FIRST QUARTER OF 2021

COVID-19 VACCINE TO BE AVAILABLE EARLY NEXT YEAR

RM3b allocation in 2021 Budget will cover 70pc of country's population

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THE first batch of Covid-19 vaccines will be made available in the first quarter of next year, the Dewan Rakyat was told yesterday.

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Khairy Jamaluddin said the RM3 billion allocated under the 2021 Budget would be able to cover 70 per cent of Malaysia's population under the national target for Covid-19 immunisation.

He said the estimation was made after taking into consideration the average price of the Covid-19 vaccine that was being developed, as well as the fair procurement percentage for each type of vaccine from pharmaceutical companies.

"However, the RM3 billion is subject to change as the price of the vaccine to be procured is still in the negotiation and discussion stages.

"The 70 per cent population target to receive Covid-19 vaccination was derived from the formula on herd immunity.

"Most of the Covid-19 vaccines that are being developed have yet to be tested on children under 12. Thus, this group will not receive the vaccination during the first stage. Instead, we will focus on adults to achieve this target," he said in the winding up of the budget debate for the ministry.

He said the roadmap for the National Vaccine Development, which would be ready in the second quarter of next year, was aimed at making Malaysia a human vaccine producer in 10

years, as it presently did not have complete facilities for such a purpose.

Apart from that, he said the ministry had also offered a new funding scheme, the Mosti Combating Covid-19 Fund (MCCOF), that encouraged research and development, commercialisation and innovation in fighting and containing the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The ministry has approved a RM2.1 million project under the fund for Universiti Malaya to develop a Covid-19 vaccine. The ministry hopes MCCOF will be a platform to create local vaccines and reduce dependency (on vaccines) from abroad.

"Apart from that, the government has included the 'transfer of technology and expertise' element through negotiations to procure vaccines from countries or overseas pharmaceutical companies.

"For example, collaboration agreements between Malaysia and the government of China signed last week saw the strengthening of cooperation between the two in vaccine research and development in future.

"My initial discussion with Russian representatives was also not limited to procurement of the Sputnik vaccine, but also transfer of expertise in developing vaccines for Covid-19 and other viruses in Malaysia."

Khairy said Pharmaniaga and Duopharma have the capacity to carry out the fill and finish processes (filling vials with vaccine and finishing the process of packaging the medicine for distribution) of the Covid-19 vaccine, although the selection of companies for the processes would not be limited to them.

"Duopharma will use its existing facility in Klang to conduct fill and finish. The facility needs to be upgraded and is expected to be completed by early 2021.

"Meanwhile, Pharmaniaga's facility has been converted for fill and finish for single and multi dosage vaccine."

Another vaccine developer that Malaysia has been in talks with is



Armed forces personnel setting up concertina wires outside the Bandar Sibuga Jaya People's Hall in Sandakan yesterday.
BERNAMA PIC

New York-based Pfizer and BioNTech. The company had, in a statement, said its vaccine was more than 90 per cent effective in providing immunity against the coronavirus.

Most of the 10 companies developing vaccines would publish the findings of their clinical trials data by the end of the year or early next year.

Malaysia has been in direct talks with eight of the companies, while the other two was under the Covid-19 Vaccine Global Access initiative, which Malaysia is in the final stages of discussions to participate in.

To a question from Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad (PH-Kuala Selangor), Khairy said an independent Covid-19 vaccine evaluation committee had been established, with epidemiologist Datuk Dr Awang Bulgiba Awang Mahmud as its chairman, in line with the government's efforts to engage various stakeholders.

He said the nine-member committee comprised specialists from various fields including virology, infectious diseases and pharmaceutical economics, and would be expanded to others.



Negri tops country's Covid-19 cases at 318

PUTRAJAYA: Negri Sembilan recorded the highest number of Covid-19 cases yesterday with 318. The country itself had a total of 970 cases.

Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said one third of the new cases came from prison clusters.

"The increase in Negri Sembilan was contributed by prison clusters, such as the Bakti cluster, which recorded 301 cases.

"The other cases were from other clusters, namely Tembok (12), Matambai (three), Penjara Sandakan (one) and the Remand Prison (one)," he said at a press conference here yesterday.

Dr Noor Hisham said other states with a high number of positive cases were Sabah at 293, followed by Selangor with 115.

Out of the cases recorded yesterday, he said 965 were local transmissions.

He said four fatalities were recorded yesterday, bringing the total number of deaths due to Covid-19 to 345.

"A total of 110 patients are being treated at intensive care units, with 47 requiring ventilator support."

Dr Noor Hisham said 2,348 pa-

tients had been discharged, bringing the cumulative total recoveries to 46,501.

One new Covid-19 cluster was detected in Sabah, with four other clusters identified in Peninsular Malaysia up to noon yesterday.

The D'Bajaru cluster, involving the Lahad Datu district in Sabah, recorded 56 new cases, making it one of the top three clusters that contributed to the country's daily tally yesterday.

"Cases in this cluster were detected during community screening at two high-risk villages since Nov 11.

"Up to Nov 25, 609 individuals have been screened, with 90 testing positive for Covid-19," he said.

In the peninsula, Johor recorded two new clusters, while Selangor and Terengganu reported one new cluster each.

"The Batu Tujuh cluster in Johor involves the Batu Pahat and Johor Baru districts. The index case (Case 54,703) was a severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) case, who tested positive on Nov 22.

"Up to Nov 25, 13 out of 144 individuals screened in this clus-

ter tested positive.

"The Tanjung Bunga cluster in Johor involves the Johor Baru district. The index case (Case 53,639) was a SARI case, who tested positive on Nov 21.

"Up to Nov 25, 87 individuals have been screened, with 11 testing positive," he said.

In Selangor, the Gangsa cluster involving Kuala Langat district was detected after the index case (Case 56,262) tested positive for Covid-19 during a screening at a workplace on Nov 23.

"Up to Nov 25, 30 out of the 78 individuals tested positive under this cluster, involving one Malaysian and 29 foreign nationals," he said.

The Kerengge cluster, involving Marang district in Terengganu, detected the index case (Case 49,709) during screening of symptomatic individuals on Nov 17.

"Up to Nov 25, 680 individuals have been screened, where six were positive."

He said the total number of active clusters up to yesterday afternoon stood at 169. Three clusters namely Idaman, Bayu and Bah Kota ended yesterday.