



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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Stop blaming foreigners for the escalating Covid-19 cases

Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) is surprised by the statement given by the Senior Minister (Security Cluster) Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob who said that the management of residential areas and condominiums are allowed to make Covid-19 swab tests a compulsory requirement for tenants, especially foreigners before they are allowed into the premises.

The Strata Management Act (SMA) 2013 has no provisions allowing a joint management body or management corporation to compel residents to submit their swab test results or otherwise bar them if they fail to comply.

The statement singling out foreigners is unwise, particularly coming from a minister, as it may trigger xenophobic aggressions against foreign workers who have made substantial contribution to our economic growth. Moreover, when he mentioned “condominiums”, whether it includes foreign managerial staff, specialists and researchers.

If he refers to foreign factory workers who are housed in low-cost flats then the government has to be blamed because in better times the government did not ensure proper accommodation for these foreign workers. It was left to the employers to cramp these workers in flats units under unhygienic conditions. Maximising profit was the sole objective of these employers and the government cannot plead ignorance. Although such a sad situation had been reported to the authorities over the years, among the latest was by the Ethical Trading Initiative in 2019, the problem still remains.

The government has ordered employers to ensure that all their foreign workers undergo mandatory Covid-19 screening at the start of 2021. We would like to ask if a month-old swab test result is still valid or if they have to take a swab test every two weeks? Assuming that the property management forces foreign workers to produce Covid-19 swab test results, almost none of these workers will be able to afford the test if the employer does not want to pay for them.

The foreign workers should not be made scapegoats for the rapidly worsening Covid-19 situation. It is obvious that the current horrendous pandemic situation took place after the Sabah Elections on 26 September last year, and when interstate/inter district travel was permitted from 7 December 2020.

Moreover, does it mean that if the person who is unable to show the swab test result has to sleep on the street whether or not he is infected? We call on the authorities to seek rational solutions to curb the spread of the pandemic and, at the same time, ensure that foreigners are not victimised.

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