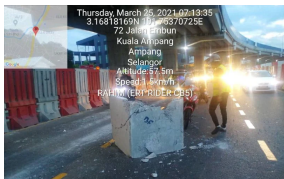




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Frontliners should have been better recognised



By [Dzulkifli Abdul Razak](#) - March 23, 2021 @ 12:17am



Bernama file pic

THE meeting with Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah, the much-admired Health director-general, on the first anniversary of the Covid-19 lockdown on March 18, left a lasting impression. It was the first time we had met face to face since the pandemic broke out.

It was a significant event given how busy he has been since more than a year ago, regularly seen on television, eagerly awaited by many anxious to know the latest.

Dr Noor Hisham became a household figure when he demonstrated leadership in handling the pandemic.

Reversing a worrying trend into something optimistic, frontliners have made Malaysia the pride of its citizens in the eyes of the world.

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More so when the virus was mostly unknown to the world. Since there was no foolproof plan to fall back on, it took a professional to command the respect and trust of the community to fall in line in the fight against the invisible enemy.

What made the pandemic more challenging was the fact that there was no known medicine to stop its spread.

Hence none was spared, but ironically, not all were convinced about its life-threatening mysteries.

In some communities and countries, there were those who doubted the news announcing the number of deaths, even in the most developed ones. Indeed, it was exactly this attitude that held back the progress needed to flatten the curve of the infection.

In a relatively short period, Malaysians began to breathe easy again, adjusting to the (re)new(ed) normal. The tagline #kitajagakita began to take hold.

This didn't last long as some people began to take things for granted and lowered their guard, causing the pandemic to go through the roof.

The third wave gripped the nation with daily new cases jumping to four figures, at times surpassing 5,000.

Dr Noor Hisham was back on the firing line, unfairly made a scapegoat by those with vested interests, even accused of being "afraid" to die, which he handled with relative calm.

The meeting with him showed this on his face. The daily new figures had dropped to 1,213, the lowest since then.

His optimism shone through when asked: will three-digit infection see the light of day? The month of May should be the point of departure given that Hari Raya Aidilfitri will coincide with it.

That will be a dream come true for Malaysians, especially open houses with *kuih-muih* and traditional food.

This, however, could come to naught if there are Malaysians who refuse to learn from what had happened in the third wave.

For this, the frontliners are more than crucial yet again.

Here is where March 18 is momentous, a historic event for Malaysians.

To the members of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) community, it means living up to its raison d'être, that is, to realise a better world for humanity. This translates into IIUM values of leadership, trust, knowledge-driven and mercy to all.

The fact that the university voted to recognise frontliners with its highest honour for global social transformation on the first anniversary spoke volumes about its deep sense of social responsibility as crafted in the IIUM missions.

Raja Permaisuri Agong Tunku Hajah Azizah Aminah Maimunah

Iskandariah made the event a humbling auspicious occasion when she



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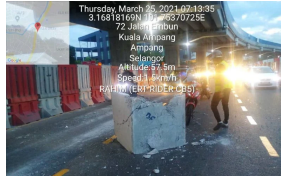
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Iskandar made the event a humbling auspicious occasion when she said: "I am deeply honoured to present this [Ibn Khaldun Merit] Award to frontliners as a symbol of appreciation, gratitude and recognition for the service and efforts you have made during the rapid outbreak that our country and the world are grappling with."

It was a small token of appreciation for a colossal sacrifice by frontliners.

IIUM is the only organisation (academic and otherwise) that launched such a systematic award, which highlights its intent on humanising education. Meaning, education at IIUM is repurposed to bring back the

higher goal of being educated where all lives matter.

Let's remember those who have put their lives on the line for us. In this sense, March 18 could have been better remembered nationally.

The writer, an NST columnist for more than 20 years, is International Islamic University Malaysia rector

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