

Deadline to test 1.7mil foreign workers too soon, say bosses

By **Ho Kit Yen** - February 3, 2021 1:41 PM



The Malaysian Employers Federation says it will take 31 days to test all the foreign workers in the country.

PETALING JAYA: The government's threat to revoke the temporary work permits of foreign workers if their employers fail to get them tested for Covid-19 by Feb 28 is not the right approach, business leaders say.

They said the time frame given to test more than 1.7 million workers was too short.

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director Shamsuddin Bardan said the appointed centres could only carry out 54,000 swab tests a day.

"It would take about 31 days for all foreign workers to be tested.

"The service providers should be directed to go to the workplace to do the RTK antigen tests as sending the workers to the centres would be risky," he told FMT.

Shamsuddin said that if the government insisted on revoking the work permits of untested foreigners, the workers might opt to run away for fear of arrest.

"They will not stay on with their employers and may abscond to join the ranks of illegal foreigners," he said, pointing out that this might lead to another problem or outbreak subsequently.

Yesterday, human resources minister M Saravanan said employers who did not screen their foreign workers for Covid-19 by the end of February would not be able to renew their work permits.

He urged employers to ensure that their foreign workers were screened to help stop the spread of Covid-19, in light of the many workplace clusters being detected.

SME Association of Malaysia president Michael Kang concurred with Shamsuddin, saying the government should appoint more test centres.

"I still prefer the government to sit down with industry people to come up with solutions," he said.

The government has made it mandatory for all employers to have their foreign workers tested from Jan 1.

Up to Monday, a total of 273,032 foreign workers had been screened, with 4,952 testing positive.