

Najib slammed over call to deport unvaccinated migrants

By **Samuel Chua** - September 18, 2021 8:30 AM



Migrant workers queuing up to get their vaccination.

PETALING JAYA: An activist group has urged Putrajaya to reject former prime minister Najib Razak's call for the deportation of unvaccinated migrant workers.

Tenaganita executive director Glorene Das said the government should instead clean up the immigration system to ensure better management of foreign labour.

Speaking to FMT, she alleged that Najib never had a plan to address the issue of undocumented workers when he was in power and that their numbers increased under his administration.

"It was always about scapegoating them, criminalising them and looking into strategies to make more money from this group for political interests," she said.

She was reacting to Najib's recent statement in the Dewan Rakyat that foreign workers should be given four months to get vaccinated or face action, including deportation to their home countries.



*Tenaganita executive director
Glorene Das.*

He also suggested the jailing of people who continue to employ unvaccinated foreign workers after the four-month period.

Das said it was obvious that the government must encourage migrant workers to get vaccinated, but she added that threats of raids issued by the home ministry would only discourage them from coming out.

She noted that the health ministry had said it had no problem with immigrants coming out to be vaccinated.

"We cannot have different ministries issuing different statements or making ad hoc policies to fit separate agendas," she said.

She urged the government to deal with the systemic exploitation of workers, saying this was the reason for the high number of undocumented migrants in the country.

She said migrant workers would often become undocumented after escaping from exploitative working conditions or as a result of weaknesses in the migrant labour management system.

Such circumstances enabled employers to neglect renewing work permits or allowed unethical officials to facilitate illegal migrant labour recruitment, Das added.

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director Shamsuddin Bardan said Najib's suggestion of a four-month grace period was reasonable.

He said employers should have a clear priority to ensure the vaccination of all their employees, including migrant workers.

"The Occupational Health and Safety Act 1994, Sections 15 and 17, impose a duty on employers to ensure the safety, health and welfare of their employees," he said.

Shamsuddin added that it was important for the government to minimise disputes between employers and employees by coming up with a guideline for dealing with workers refusing to get vaccinated.