

Focus on illegal workers, govt urged

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By **FATIMAH ZAINAL**

PETALING JAYA: Controlling the spread of Covid-19 among documented foreign workers has been well managed but the government must do more with the illegals, say bosses.

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said it was difficult to control and track the spread of the virus among illegal workers as they were not covered by any form of medical insurance.

He said they were also likely to live in cramped places, such as in Jalan Masjid India.

Shamsuddin said there could be up to 3.3 million illegal workers in the country, against 2.2 million documented ones.

He said a “conservative estimate” put the number of illegal foreign workers in the country on par with their legalised counterparts.

“However, many believe that for every legal foreign worker, there are about 1.5 illegal workers.

“The government needs to put more effort to control the spread of Covid-19 among illegal foreign workers,” he said yesterday.

Covid-19 cases among foreigners in Malaysia



(As of April 16, 12pm)

Positive cases	601
Active cases	356
Recovered	242
Deaths	3

Majority of the foreigners are from:

Indonesia	108
Philippines	104
Bangladesh	63
India	60
Pakistan	51

These include foreign workers, tourists, refugees and asylum seekers



Source: Health Ministry's CPRC,
Health Ministry's Corporate Communication Unit

TheStar graphics

Shamsuddin said Covid-19 infections among foreign workers was now over 600, or about 0.3% of their workforce in the country.

Under the second phase of the movement control order (MCO) from April 1 to 14, three residential buildings in Kuala Lumpur were put under an enhanced MCO after a spate of cases among its residents.

Foreigners are said to make up the bulk of those staying in the Selangor Mansion and Malayan Mansion flats in Jalan Masjid India and Menara City One condominium in Jalan Munshi Abdullah.

There are said to be over 120 infections in the three buildings.

On Saturday, Health director-general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said the ministry would embark on a large-scale screening of foreign workers.

Shamsuddin said foreigners working for firms approved to operate during the third phase of the MCO must first undergo health screening.

Once given a clean bill of health, only then would they be allowed to report for work, he added.

Foreign workers registered and contributing to the Social Security Organisation (Socso) are eligible for screening, with the cost to be borne by the body.

“There are 700,000 foreign workers employed by companies who have yet to be registered.

“If they want to get screened and for the cost to be borne by Socso, they have to be registered and contribute to Socso,” said Shamsuddin.

He said documented foreign workers would not face issues on medical treatment as they were covered by the Foreign Worker Hospitalisation and Surgical Insurance Scheme.

He added that under the Employment Act, employers were liable to provide consultation fees for treatment of foreign workers. Meanwhile, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Malaysia is working with the government to manage Covid-19 infections among refugees.

Its public health officer here, Dr Susheela Balasundaram, said since the start of the outbreak, the agency has been coordinating closely with the Health Ministry and Crisis Preparedness and Response Centre to ensure that all refugee and asylum-seeking communities were included in the government’s national response measures, to prevent infection from spreading among the communities.

There are some 180,000 refugees registered with UNHCR in Malaysia.

Since March 21, UNHCR and its NGO partners joined law enforcement personnel and district health officers to reach out to refugee communities across the country on Covid-19 prevention and screening.