

## Employers miss deadline to screen foreign workers



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by **NUR HAZIQAH A MALEK** / pic by **TMR FILE**

MALAYSIAN employers have collectively failed to meet the government's deadline to screen for Covid-19 every legal foreign worker they employ by March 31.

However, despite the government's threats to freeze foreign workers' pass renewals if the deadline is not met, the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) said no such freeze has been imposed.

The government had imposed the deadline, which **employers have said is impossible to meet** due to limited resources to screen millions of workers in time in the effort to curb the rise in Covid-19 cases among foreign workers early this year.

MEF ED Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said there have been no reports on issues relating to foreign workers' pass renewals.

He said employers are working as fast as they can to screen all workers even though they have missed the deadline.

"I have not heard of any issues or hang-ups," he said yesterday.

"However, the screening for legal foreign workers is more or less being done regardless of (missing) the deadline."

As of Monday, the cumulative number of foreign workers who have been screened stands at 685,687, involving 35,367 employers and out of the total, 10,222 were found positive.

He said, typically, less than 700 workers can be screened through the healthcare system, despite the involvement of 1,544 private clinics.

Employers were required to screen all their foreign workers starting from Jan 1 to March 31 this year at a time when a large proportion of local infections was from foreign industry workers.

Foreign workers who contribute to the Social Security Organisation can conduct their screening at clinics appointed by the body.

Previously, employers had said they had issues with meeting the screening deadline due to the limited capacity of clinics in the country.

Similarly, the MEF had also stated that the focus should be better placed on vaccination efforts instead of the screening and that the government should not implement the freezing on renewal for foreign workers' pass.

However, with the vaccination programme slowly rolling in and is now in the second phase to address the elderly and high-risk groups, Shamsuddin said employers are moving to register their workers for the vaccine.

"Considering the screening is being done, employers are now registering their foreign workers and later (aim) to facilitate the vaccination itself," he said.

Earlier this month, *The Malaysian Reserve* reported that the Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri M Saravanan said all foreign workers who are registered and possess legal documents will be vaccinated by the government.

The minister added that reaching out to undocumented foreign workers for vaccination, however, will be a problem.

While vaccination will provide a measure of security for factories, the wisdom is that prevention through screening is a better option.

During a Covid-19 community screening programme held in Balakong, Selangor, Bangi MP Dr Ong Kian Ming said factory owners in the area were reluctant to send their workers for screening because they worry about business disruption if cases are detected.

A new cluster was reported on April 8 in Jalan Taming among factory workers, which saw a total of nine cases detected among 19 individuals who were screened, which translates to an infection rate of 47.3%.