No one wins in foreign workers’ vaccination bill dispute

By Teoh Jie Ying - February 18, 2021 3:29 PM

PETALING JAYA: No one wins if vaccination is delayed by quarelling over who pays for the immunisation of foreign workers, say employer groups.

They believe that as taxpayers themselves, employers are not the only ones to benefit from the government’s promise to vaccinate all foreigners residing in Malaysia for free. They say the country as a whole will benefit.

Their stance comes after Sarawak deputy chief minister James Jemut Masing said it was unfair to provide free Covid-19 vaccination for foreign workers with taxpayers’ money.

He said it should be the employers’ responsibility to vaccinate the foreign workers they put on their payroll in the first place.

Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers vice-president Nathan K Suppiah said including foreign workers in the vaccination programme acknowledges their contribution to the economy.

"Foreign workers are part of our community. There should be no discrimination in this regard," he said.

He said employers themselves have contributed taxes to the economy, which includes the annual levy they pay for their foreign workers.

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsuddin Bardan told FMT that given the economic pinch, employers could not help even if they wanted to.

“On top of cash flow issues, many employers are struggling to cover their operation costs,” he said.

Shamsuddin said employers are more than willing to “meet halfway”, and cooperation is more vital than ever should the vaccination programme hope to beat the virus.

“The priority at the moment is flattening the curve of Covid-19 infections, and the vaccine might do just that,” he said. “All of our efforts could be in vain if we stall for even a moment over this dispute.”