‘Govt should help employers’

NATION

Friday, 02 Apr 2021

PETALING JAYA: Employers should not be penalised for missing the March 31 deadline to screen their foreign workers for Covid-19, says the Malaysian Employers Federation.

Its executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said that rather than penalise them, the authorities should instead extend a helping hand.

"Some employers may have run into logistics problems such as making the necessary appointments with designated healthcare facilities to carry out the tests, " he said.

According to Shamsuddin, only a small number of employers have yet to completely screen their foreign workers.

"We were informed in a meeting with the Human Resources Ministry last week that about 1.5 million registered foreign workers out of 1.7 million had undergone screening.

"This means that there were about 200,000 workers left to screen before the end of March 31 deadline, " he said.

Mandatory screening of foreign workers by employers began on Dec 1 last year in Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Penang, Sabah, Kuala Lumpur and Labuan before it was expanded nationwide on Feb 2 this year.

Under the screening exercise, the Social Security Organisation (Sosco) would bear the RM60 cost for the antigen rapid test kit, with employers only required to pay the charge by the healthcare facilities carrying out the tests.

The government initially set Feb 28 as a deadline for the screening exercise but extended it to March 31.

Employers who fail to screen their foreign workers are liable to a RM1,000 maximum fine or six months’ jail, while the renewal of work permits for the workers would be denied.

"There should be some leniency in the policy, as our focus should now be on vaccination, " urged Shamsuddin.

Screening aside, another employer said other measures are needed to safeguard workers against the virus.

Meanwhile, Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers president Tan Sri Soh Thian Lai said ample time had been given to employers to screen their foreign workers.

"Most employers took swift action to get their foreign workers tested at approved healthcare facilities in order to meet the initial deadline.

"The extension of the deadline most certainly facilitated and provided employers with ample time to complete the screening process, " he said when contacted yesterday.

He said he believes the screening process had gone smoothly, with Sosco ensuring sufficient supply of tests kits at the designated healthcare facilities.

Mydin Mohamed Holdings Bhd managing director Datuk Ameen Ali Mydin said the retailer was able to carry out testing for all its foreign workers smoothly.

"We got the help of our panel doctors to carry out the test and met the deadline, " he said.

"I believe most employers have done so as ample time was given."