MEF: Impossible to meet Covid-19 screening deadline

**There are only about 1,500 facilities authorised to run the tests**

by NUR HAZIQAH A MALEK / pic by BERNAMA

MALAYSIAN employers said they cannot meet the government’s March 31 deadline to have all foreign workers screened for Covid-19 because it is logistically impossible.

The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) said there are not enough facilities to screen all the registered foreign workers by the end of the month, following the directive from the Ministry of Human Resources last week.

ED Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said there are about half a million foreign workers, employed by members, who have not been screened.

"As of Feb 29, there is approximately a cumulative of 1.2 million legal foreign workers who have been tested for Covid-19, or about 70.5% of the 1.7 million legal foreign workers population.

"There are still about half a million of them who need to be screened," he told The Malaysian Reserve.

He said even if employers are able to send workers for screening, it would be impossible to meet the deadline because there are only about 1,500 facilities authorised to run the tests.

"Each clinic that does Covid-19 testing has limited capacity to perform testing per day.

"Employers still need to wait for their turn to get their foreign workers tested for the virus even though failure to do the testing by today may affect the workers' renewal for their temporary working visitor pass," he said.

As of Sunday, 2,506 foreign workers underwent screening and two were found positive, while in total, 618,486 workers have been tested.

Shamsuddin said the federation is asking the government not to enforce its policy of not renewing worker passes if they cannot meet the deadline for Covid screening if they happen to fall into this category.
Employers are also factoring in the costs involved if workers are required to go for screening more than once, which, unlike the first screening, will not be subsidised by the Social Security Organisation, he added.

"Should legal foreign workers be required to go for subsequent tests, it will be a financial burden to employers considering they will need to pay for both the test kit and service fee," he said.

Shamsuddin said employers are still figuring out how frequently the workers will need to be tested to control the spread of the transmission.

"Most employers are grappling with this issue as being tested negative for Covid-19 does not mean they will not be infected in the future.

"There is still the possibility that a foreign worker was tested negative today, then he might end up positive the next day and there will be a subsequent test that he needs to undergo," he said.

It was reported previously that retailers wanted the government to give them the flexibility to carry out screening tests for both local and foreign workers.

Malaysian Retail Association VP Datuk Ameer Ali Mydin said while employers are aware of their responsibilities, the extension of the testing period would be helpful to ensure that all workers are covered.