

Target illegal foreign workers, not documented ones, to check spread of disease, says MEF

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Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said today the government had to “go big” on catching and deporting illegal foreign workers instead of imposing extra checks on legal ones. Pic by RASUL AZLI SAMAD.

By **Veena Babulal** - August 18, 2017 @ 7:19pm

KUALA LUMPUR: The rising spread of infectious diseases in Malaysia should be blamed on illegal foreign workers instead of those who are documented, and the authorities need to step up enforcement to address the issue.

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said today the government had to “go big” on catching and deporting illegal foreign workers instead of imposing extra checks on legal ones.

“The government is missing the point... foreign workers have undergone stringent checks. One in their home country by certified doctors approved by Malaysia and they have a follow up within a month of their arrival here, with Fomema.

"Of course we have seen cases where the worker fails their tests here but these are both minimal and they are immediately sent back. So, (it goes to reckon that) illegal workers are responsible for the spread (of infectious diseases in Malaysia)," he said in response to an announcement by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi that there would be additional checks for foreign workers.

The new ruling requires foreign workers to be checked once every two years until they reach their maximum service period of 10 years. This is over and above the tests they already undergo at the end of the first and second years of their employment.

Shamsuddin said MEF expected to be called for engagement on the matter soon but also planned to send the government an objection next week as the ruling would drive up the cost of doing business.

"There are some 1.7 million documented foreign workers. If half of them are to go on checks every year at the average cost of RM185 (the checks being RM180 for men and RM190 for women) it's an additional RM157.25 million that employers have to fork out on a yearly basis."

Malaysian Indian Restaurant Owners Association (Primas) T. Muthusamy also blamed the spread of infectious diseases on illegal foreign workers, adding that the government had been unsuccessful in rounding them up and keeping them out of the country.

"Primas is, however, agreeable to get the checks done as the rise of these diseases will threaten the overall health of the population... but the cost has to be slashed by at least 50 per cent.

"The government also wants to decrease the cost of doing business but the bill for the checks contradicts this," he said.