

Bosses: Help ease our burden

Employers hoping for smooth process to resolve shortage of workers

By ALLISON LAI
allison@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Employers want the government to negotiate with the source countries of foreign labour to cap the recruitment fees charged by their agents there as the online application for the hiring of some 32,000 workers begin this month.

They are also calling for tax deductions to be allowed for expenses incurred for the Covid-19 screening and quarantine of foreign workers.

Welcoming the latest hiring method announced by the Human Resources Ministry, National Chamber of Commerce and Industry Malaysia (NCCIM) president Datuk Low Kian Chuan said this had been "long-awaited".

"We hope the application and approval process will be smooth as the industries are eagerly waiting for the supply of workers to minimise disruptions in production," he said.

Low said standard operating procedure, including the required Covid-19 screening and quarantine of freshly hired foreign workers, was "necessary" to ensure that they were safe, healthy and vaccinated, which would in turn result in a safe workplace.

"The government should allow employers to claim tax deductions for expenses incurred for the Covid-19 screening and quarantine," he said.

NCCIM is a federation of five



Good news:
Foreign workers milling around a commercial area in Kuala Lumpur in this file photo. Online recruitment applications to hire foreign workers will open in stages this month and in February.

national trade organisations – the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia, Malay Chamber of Commerce Malaysia, Malaysian Associated Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Malaysian International Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM).

On Saturday, Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri M. Saravanan announced that online recruitment

applications to hire foreign workers would be opened in stages this month and in February.

Online application for recruitment of foreign workers in the plantation sector through special exemption will be open from Jan 28 through the website www.fwcms.com.my.

Application for foreign workers for other sectors, including the plantation sector without special exemption, will be open from Feb 15.

Also calling for a smooth and hassle-free application process to resolve the shortage of workers plaguing them for the past two years, Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman said on top of the high cost of recruitment that could come up to RM7,000 for a plantation worker, including the recruitment agent's fees, bosses had to fork out about RM4,200 for each employee to undergo quarantine.

"MEF hopes that the government can discuss and negotiate to control the recruitment fees charged by the agents at the source countries.

"Whatever fees charged by agents at the source countries will have to be borne by employers in Malaysia under the zero-fee recruitment policy," he said.

MLF, he said, also hoped that the length of time taken for the foreign workers to arrive, which might take up to six months, could be shortened as bosses urgently needed the employees to help in their recovery efforts.

"MEF proposes that the recruitment and management of foreign workers, including foreign domestic workers, be placed under one ministry for efficiency and business efficacy," he said, adding the Human Resources Ministry should shoulder the task.

There should also be more quarantine centres, including outside the Klang Valley, and the government should subsidise employers for quarantine expenses to help ease their financial burden, added Syed Hussain.

The SOP for the entry of foreign workers comprise four stages – pre-release, upon arrival, post-arrival (quarantine period) and post-quarantine.

On Dec 10, the Cabinet had agreed that foreign worker recruitment would be opened to all sectors other than plantation. Permitted sectors are agriculture, manufacturing, services, mining and quarrying, construction and domestic helpers.