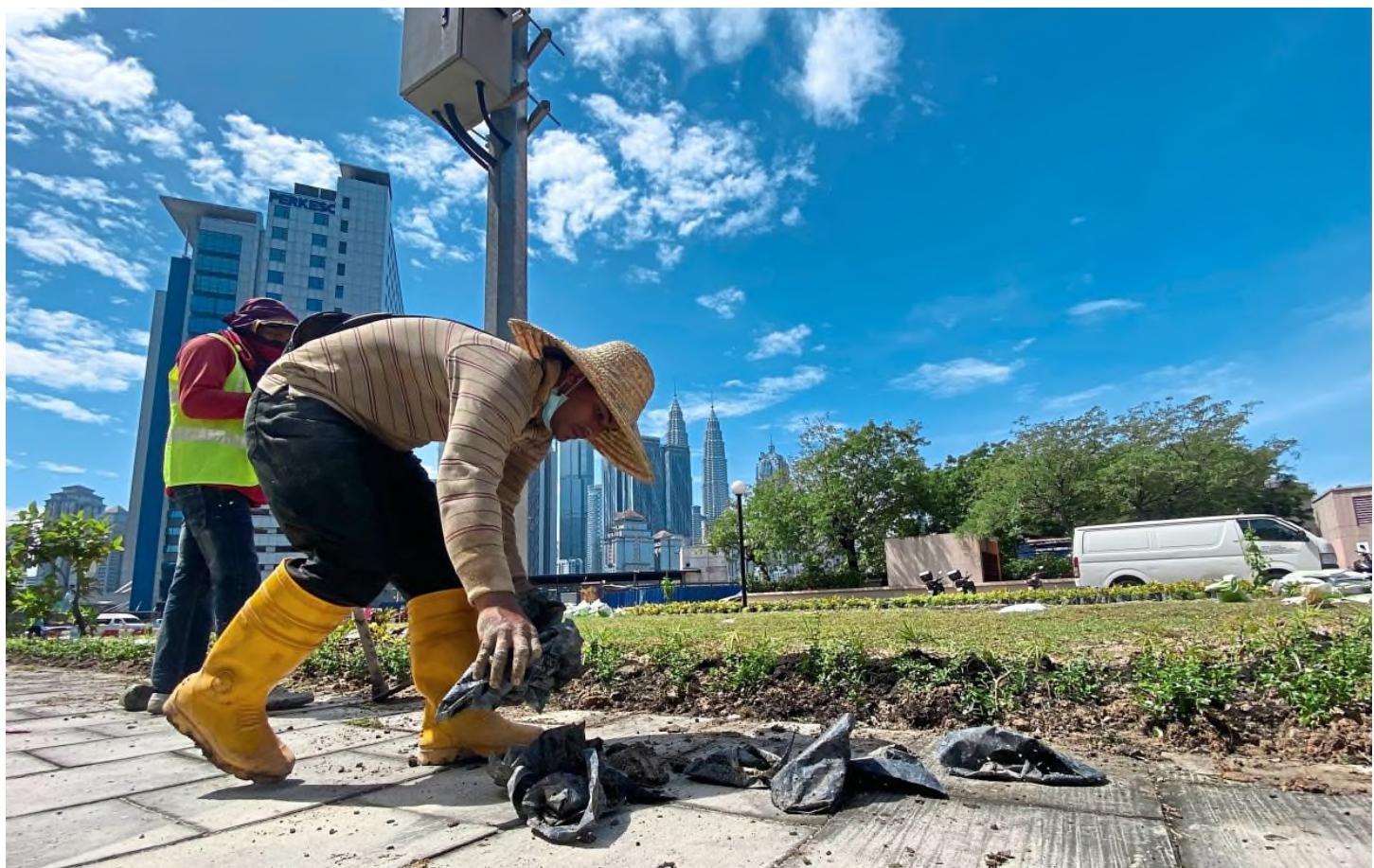


## Subsidise costs for foreign workers

By DIYANA PFORDTEN

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Worker shortage: Groups are hoping the government will be able to help with the reduction of foreign labour cost. — RAJA FAISAL HISHAN/The Star

PETALING JAYA: More stringent vetting procedures will be in place when foreign workers return to the country, due to the Covid-19 Omicron variant threat, but employer groups are hoping the government will help reduce the costs, especially for vaccination.

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman said all foreign workers coming in should be inoculated against Covid-19 with regular testing conducted as part of the employers' responsibilities.

“To reduce costs, we hope the government will continue to provide the vaccination free of charge,” he said.

Syed Hussain added that the venue and manpower to administer the vaccination should also be provided by the government under the National Immunisation programme.

Employers will now need to ensure that foreign workers are quarantined upon arrival.

Bookings for quarantine are to be made after the foreign workers have passed their medical examinations and issued with a visa with reference (VDR) through the Foreign Workers Centralised Management System (FWCMS).

This, said Syed Hussain, would increase costs for employers by between RM2,000 and RM3,000 per worker.

“Quarantine centres are limited and are located around the Klang Valley, comprising hotels on the private quarantine centre list approved by the National Disaster Management Agency (Nadma).

“We hope more quarantine centres can be opened, especially outside the Klang Valley, to lower the cost of quarantine,” he said.

He added that the government should consider giving employers double tax deductions on the costs for all the measures taken to manage and control the spread of Covid-19.

“This includes vaccination, test kits and modifications done to the workplace,” he said.

He added that the government should urgently process new foreign worker applications so they can be brought in quickly to overcome the shortage of workers, especially in the construction, plantation and manufacturing industries.

SME Association of Malaysia president Ding Hong Sing said he also hoped the process could be expedited and simplified as employers are in desperate need of workers.

“We are facing staff shortages and with a number of them under quarantine, operations in many companies are affected.

“This hurts the economy as well,” he said, adding that one to two million foreign workers had returned to their own countries during the pandemic.

Ding added that the government should consider absorbing the cost of vaccination for foreign workers.

“We hope the government will help bear the cost of vaccination as most SMEs are still recovering from the economic impact of Covid-19 lockdowns,” he said.

He said this included providing the foreign workers with booster shots.

Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) president Tan Sri Soh Thian Lai said he hoped there will be changes to the quarantine standard operating procedure (SOP) for foreign workers who will be brought in, in view of the fact that inbound travellers from April 1 will not be required to quarantine as long as they are fully vaccinated.

“As for the booster dose, employers could arrange for the new workers who have not received their booster jabs in their country of origin to get it administered as soon as they arrive as part of their obligation to ensure workers are fully protected and to keep their workplace safe,” he said.

He added that employers should also bear the cost of Covid-19 tests as part of the recruitment package where employers cover all related costs in bringing the workers into the country for employment.

On the recruitment of foreign domestic helpers, Julian Tan, a consulting director of an employment agency, said there are still no directives from the government.

“It is also unclear whether the new quarantine regulations will apply for foreign domestic helpers who are fully vaccinated,” he said.

The Human Resources Ministry said it has received 200,000 applications for Bangladeshi foreign workers, which are presently being vetted.

Its minister, Datuk Seri M. Saravanan, told a press conference yesterday that workers would be allowed for all sectors once the process is completed.

He added that the ministry is hoping to sign the memorandum of understanding with Indonesia in Bali on March 17, which will enable the country to bring in foreign maids.