



Employers: Give us more time to house workers

PETALING JAYA: Cramped and unsuitable living conditions have contributed to the rapid spread of Covid-19 among foreign workers, but employers have appealed for alternatives and flexibility in providing suitable accommodations.

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said that employers were facing higher costs and complex requirements to comply with the Workers' Minimum Standards of Housing and Amenities Act 1900 (Act 446).

"Employers are trying their level best to comply with Act 446 but with the short period of time, it is very difficult," he said.

He said MEF had urged the gov-

ernment to take into consideration the reality of the situation on the ground.

"Employers who desperately try to give better accommodations to their foreign workers should be allowed to do so without having to adhere strictly to Act 446.

"What is important is that the accommodations are better than before and help break the chain of Covid-19 infections among foreign workers," said Shamsuddin.

Real Estate and Housing Developers Association Malaysia (Rehda) president Datuk Soam Heng Choon has suggested that complying with physical distancing measures must be prioritised first before the need for employers to fulfil Act 446.

He said employers were currently trying hard to find alternative accommodations for workers, especially near their workplace.

He urged the government to give a reasonable time frame for stakeholders to comply with Act 466.

Soam said addressing the issue required multi-pronged action and that besides providing suitable accommodations, workers also needed to be educated and disciplined about physical distancing.

"We are also asking the government to segmentalise two parts, one being temporary workers' accommodations such as that needed for a few years, and the other is a permanent worker dormitory for those working for established factories

and long-term positions," he said.

SME Association of Malaysia president Datuk Michael Kang said as a short-term strategy, employers had rented additional places for workers to enable physical distancing as part of efforts to stem Covid-19.

"We are also discussing with the government to work out a centralised foreign worker hostel system to help SMEs reduce the cost and improve living conditions, like in Singapore," he added.

Kang said SMEs were strictly complying with the standard operating procedure, as well as providing a digital system to monitor the spread of Covid-19 among staff, which included details on whether a worker had undergone a Covid-19 test.