Fear of detention overriding fear of getting Covid-19



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NATION

Thursday, 29 Jul 2021



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| In line for inoculation: Volunteers checking | y vaccination appointment details of fore | gn workers at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre | - FAIHAN GHANI/The Star |
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PETALING JAYA: The government must give its assurance that undocumented migrant workers and refugees going for their Covid-19 vaccinations will not be detained by the authorities, several groups have said.

| Migrants rights groups and the Indonesian Embassy sought a guarantee from the authorities that undocumented migrants would not be arre | Privacy - Terms |
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Alex Ong of Migrant Care said that many were concerned as the Immigration Department had been carrying out raids against undocumented migrants.

"If they are arrested, they will be placed in detention centres where the chance of contracting the virus is high.

"They want their vaccinations but at the same time are scared," he added.

"The best solution for undocumented foreign workers and refugees might be to use mobile units."

Indonesian Ambassador to Malaysia Hermono said the main concern of many undocumented Indonesians was getting picked up by the authorities, especially after their vaccination.

"They are also worried that they have to submit personal information including their contact numbers," he said, adding that he hoped the authorities could clear the air about the issue with him.

Adrian Pereira, executive director of North South Initiative (NSI), concurred with Ong and Hermono on the reluctance of migrants to be vaccinated.

He said there was also the issue of communicating with undocumented migrants about signing the consent form.

"They can't be signing something they don't understand," he added.

Alliance of Chin Refugees chairman James Bawi Thang Bik said the main issue was how the authorities were going to verify the identities of recipients.

"There are many undocumented people from Myanmar who don't have valid documents," he said.

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He added that there were no details as to how the vaccination process for this group of people would be handled, and many of them believed they might be walking into "traps" when they go to vaccination centres.

"They are afraid that once they give their address, the Immigration Department will conduct a raid and detain them," said James.

Siyin Organisation of Malaysia secretary Daniel Lian Khawm Mung said that while they were happy with the move to vaccinate them, many v Privacy - Terms

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"I hope the Malaysian government will not do that, on humanitarian grounds, as it will deter undocumented migrants from getting vaccinated," he added.

According to Alliance of Chin Refugees' James, as at February 2020, there were 50,000 Myanmar Chin refugees in Malaysia, with 22,500 of them holding UN High Commission for Refugees cards or some form of identity document, while the others were undocumented.

Human Trafficking Watch chairman Dewi Kholifah Hamzah said it was good of the Malaysian government to offer free vaccinations to undocumented foreigners.

"Many of those who are undocumented came here with the belief they would be legalised by their local employers but that did not happen," she added.

She said many of them opted to remain here to clear their debts and feed their families.

National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme coordinating minister Khairy Jamaluddin announced last week that the government had agreed to vaccinate undocumented immigrants and refugees.

However, Immigration Department director-general Datuk Khairul Dzaimee Daud's recent statement asking illegal immigrants to be immediately registered under the Labour Recalibration Programme or the Repatriation Recalibration Plan has stoked fear in those living in the country illegally.

He was reported to have said that foreigners living here illegally could be punished under Sections 6(1)(C) and 15(1)(C) of the Immigration Act and would be deported after their sentence.

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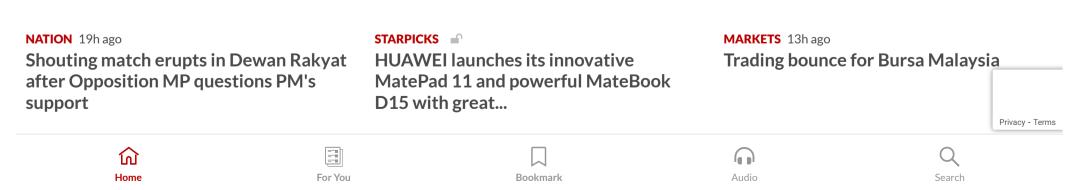
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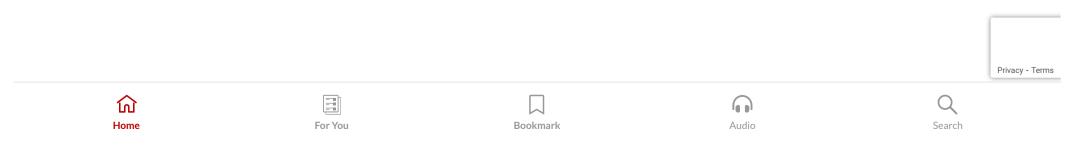


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