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## Cost for maids may drop

By **MAZWIN NIK ANIS**

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All in a day's work: Indonesian maid Maisurah Jubari performing her daily chores at her employer's house in Kuala Lumpur.

PUTRAJAYA: Malaysian employers may have to pay between RM10,000 and RM15,000 – and not up to RM25,000 – to hire domestic helpers from Indonesia as both governments agree that there must be some control over the cost, says Datuk Seri M. Saravanan.

The Human Resource Minister said the cost would include various levies and fees as well as for up to 14 days of quarantine.

Sarvanan said Putrajaya and Jakarta were in the midst of determining the pricing before the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on Recruitment of Indonesian Domestic Workers in Malaysia (MOU PDI) next month.

The tentative date for the signing of the MOU is Feb 7 or 8 and the ceremony will be held in Indonesia.

“We are still negotiating this but our stand is that the price needs to be controlled to prevent unregistered maid agencies from taking advantage to make money.

“We hope the matter can be resolved in time with the signing of the MOU,” he said after joining Science Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba to witness the signing of an MOU between Socso and Yayasan Inovasi Malaysia.

In a report by The Star, maid agencies had said the recruitment fee was between RM16,000 and RM20,000 before the pandemic and that this amount had gone up at present due to quarantine, PCR tests and higher air fare charges, totalling to about RM25,000.

However, Immigration Department director-general Datuk Seri Khairul Dzaimie Daud said the cost imposed by the government to hire foreign domestic workers for the first time was as low as RM1,136 and included various fees, such as levy, visa based on the country of origin, processing fee and pass.

Saravanan questioned how the agencies arrived at the RM25,000 figure as no maids had been brought into the country after the pandemic.

He said to ease the employers’ burden in hiring fresh foreign workers, his ministry would discuss with the authorities to bring down the cost of quarantine.

“We are requesting that the government lower the cost and hopefully, there will be a favourable outcome,” he said.

Currently, employers have to pay RM3,000 per foreign worker who has to undergo mandatory quarantine at designated stations upon their arrival in Malaysia.

Saravanan is also proposing that the quarantine be extended to 14 days from the existing seven days, pointing out that there were cases where those tested on the seventh day were found to be Covid-19 positive.

He said another matter that needed to be resolved before the signing of the MOU was Indonesia's stand that Malaysia should stop hiring its citizens who enter the country as tourists but are later employed as maids.

"Indonesia is of the opinion that this is forced labour and wants us to abolish this before the MOU is signed.

"I will be speaking with the Home Minister to get his views on the matter," said Saravanan.

The MOU PDI was signed for the first time on May 13, 2006, in Bali, and subsequently, the Protocol to Amend the MOU PDI was signed on May 31, 2011 in Bandung, which expired on May 30, 2016.

The MOU needs to be implemented immediately as Indonesia will only allow the entry of Indonesian Manpower (TKI) into Malaysia for the plantation sector after the MOU PDI was finalised.

The Cabinet has agreed to the entry of foreign workers into the plantation sector in Malaysia as a special exception.