

Headline **Screening to detect TB**
 Date **22. Jun 2009**
 Media Title **The Star**
 Section **Nation**
 Circulation **293375**
 Readership **1026812**

Language **ENGLISH**
 Page No **12**
 Article Size **396** cm2
 Frequency **Daily**
 Color **Full Color**
 AdValue **14829.23**



Screening to detect TB

Migrant workers risk infection when going home or mingling with illegals

FOONG PEK YEE

DAYANG, a 20-year-old Indonesian maid, has the best of both worlds. Declared fit by Fomema for a work permit, she takes care of her employer's baby during weekdays. During weekends, she goes home where she mingles with her family and friends.

»We are not taking the situation lightly«

DATUK SERI LIOW TIONG LAI

Then one day, she started coughing. It turned out to be tuberculosis when her employer took her for a second mandatory screening.

Her employer, known as Mrs Chung, recalling the episode which happened two years ago, says Dayang did not believe she had tuberculosis and refused treatment.

Dayang has since left her job.

Looking back, Dayang could have contracted tuberculosis when she went home to an illegal immigrant colony in Kota Kinabalu - where her family stays in crowded and poorly ventilated rooms, recalls Mrs Chung, a mother of two.

Dayang's case is not an isolated one.

The mingling of illegal immigrants and foreign workers is a big worry to the Government.

Mandatory health screening may be able to pick up cases like Dayang's but not everybody is like Mrs Chung.

It was reported in Sabah in 2007 that 52,000 foreign workers in the state underwent screening in the first quarter of 2006, but only half of them went for a second screening in the first quarter of the following year. The mandatory

screening covers three rounds, the third and last one is before the end of the second year of employment.

Compounding the problem of non-compliance with the screening is the estimated 500,000 or more illegal immigrants in Sabah.

In the case of Dayang, it is quite obvious that she contracted tuberculosis from her family members and friends who are illegal immigrants.

Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai has urged employers not to take the screening lightly. Workers must also be provided with proper housing and given enough rest, he adds.

While only six diseases are slotted for mandatory screening - hepatitis, tuberculosis, sexual diseases, HIV/AIDS, malaria and leprosy - Liow says the ministry is also monitoring other diseases as well.

"Our infectious diseases surveillance systems exist at national, state and district levels. Currently, there are 27 infectious diseases that are designated as notifiable under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Disease Act 1988 and requires mandatory notification," he adds.

"Some of these diseases are non-existent but we (ministry) are not taking the situation lightly," Liow says, referring to diseases like acute poliomyelitis, plague, yellow fever, ebola and rabies.

Last but not least, the minister says employers must remain vigilant at all times and send their foreign workers for treatment if they notice something amiss.

Foreign workers found unfit for work permit in 2003

Diseases	Cases
Hepatitis	8,594
Tuberculosis	10,517
Sexual Disease	2,392
Pregnancy	2,110
HIV/AIDS	682
Opiates+	1,194
Cannabis+	390
Psychiatric	121
Malaria	74
Epilepsy	38
Cancer	15
Leprosy	10
Other Reasons	11,366
Total	37,503

Source: Fomema (company given the concession by the Government to conduct health screening on foreign workers)