



Setting a precedent: The exterior of the rooms for workers at the Centralised Labour Quarters (CLQ) in Sungai Buloh. The CLQ was vacated after MRT Corp completed the Sungai Buloh-Kajang Line. — KAMARUL ARIFFIN/The Star

Organised living space

The workers quarters formerly occupied during the MRT project is undergoing refurbishment and will soon be available for employers to rent for their workforce. >2&3



STARMETRO, SATURDAY 19 AUGUST 2017

Abd Rafik showing the interior of a room at the quarters. Each room can accommodate six people.



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The sports facility and assembly area where MRT Corp workers played games during their free time. — filepic

For better living conditions

In efforts to encourage employers to provide their workers with decent lodging, a non-profit company is refurbishing existing quarters while planning to build more of such facilities.

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THE 2.02ha workers' quarters in Sungai Buloh, which was built and formerly occupied by Mass Rapid Transit Corp Sdn Bhd (MRT Corp), will be available for leasing from October.

This will provide a much-needed option for employers in the Klang Valley to house their foreign workers.

Construction Labour Exchange Centre Berhad (CLAB) is preparing the quarters for rental, under the Government's effort to resolve the prevalence of sordid accommodation for foreign workers, especially in the construction sector.

CLAB is a government-linked non-profit company under the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB).

It is responsible to bring in, redistribute and manage applications for foreign construction labour of under 100 persons.

Stopping horrid housing

In light of the worsening situation of foreign workers being placed in *kongsi* units (ramshackle sheds crammed with dozens of workers) at construction sites, CLAB has taken on the new role of encouraging employers to use proper quarters.

As its pilot project, the company signed an agreement with MRT Corp to operate and rent out the Centralised Labour Quarters (CLQ) after the latter vacated the facility in July, following the completion of its Sungai Buloh-Kajang Line.

The quarters was built at a cost of RM79.5mil in 2011.

It is undergoing a two-month refurbishment budgeted at

RM1mil, subsidised by CIDB. CLAB chief executive officer Abd Rafik Abd Rajis said the move was in line with the Labour Department's efforts in addressing issues concerning workers' living conditions.

"We hope companies and factories located within a 10km or 20km radius can make use of the facility, which is especially conducive for construction companies," he told *StarMetro*.

He said the rent would be minimal as long as it was enough to cover operational cost, in order to encourage take-up.

Apart from housing essentials, the quarters is equipped with *surau*, cafeteria, kitchen, sport facilities, assembly area, sundry shop and sick bay.

The facility has 144 rooms, catering to 864 workers. Each room sleeps six.

Abd Rafik said including this facility, there are now eight CLQs for rental in the country. The others are located in Johor, Penang and Negri Sembilan but all are privately run.

He noted that the foreign workers' transit centre in Subang Jaya could also be moved here, too.

"The transit centre was set up to prevent foreign workers from creating untoward social problems.

"Upon their arrival in Malaysia, they are put up at the transit centre for four days where health screenings, briefings on dos and don'ts as well as safety induction training are conducted, before they are dispersed to their employers," he said.

Understanding that location of the worker's accommodation is often an important factor for employers, Abd Rafik said the company also planned to build satellite CLQs in the city and other high-



StarMetro's report on June 7 about the poor living conditions for foreign construction workers.

demand but land-scarce areas. "Our next move is to get the endorsement to use government land for this purpose, then we will invite companies to build the quarters, and we will manage the lease upon completion," he said, adding that three companies have been identified for this joint venture.

The company may also bring hope to underutilised or abandoned dwellings in the city which they intend to convert into workers' quarters.

For instance, a government flat in Puchong formerly used by the Defence Ministry is being prepared for this purpose.

He, however, said the company still preferred to build semi-permanent quarters as a more viable solution.

Call for more CLQs

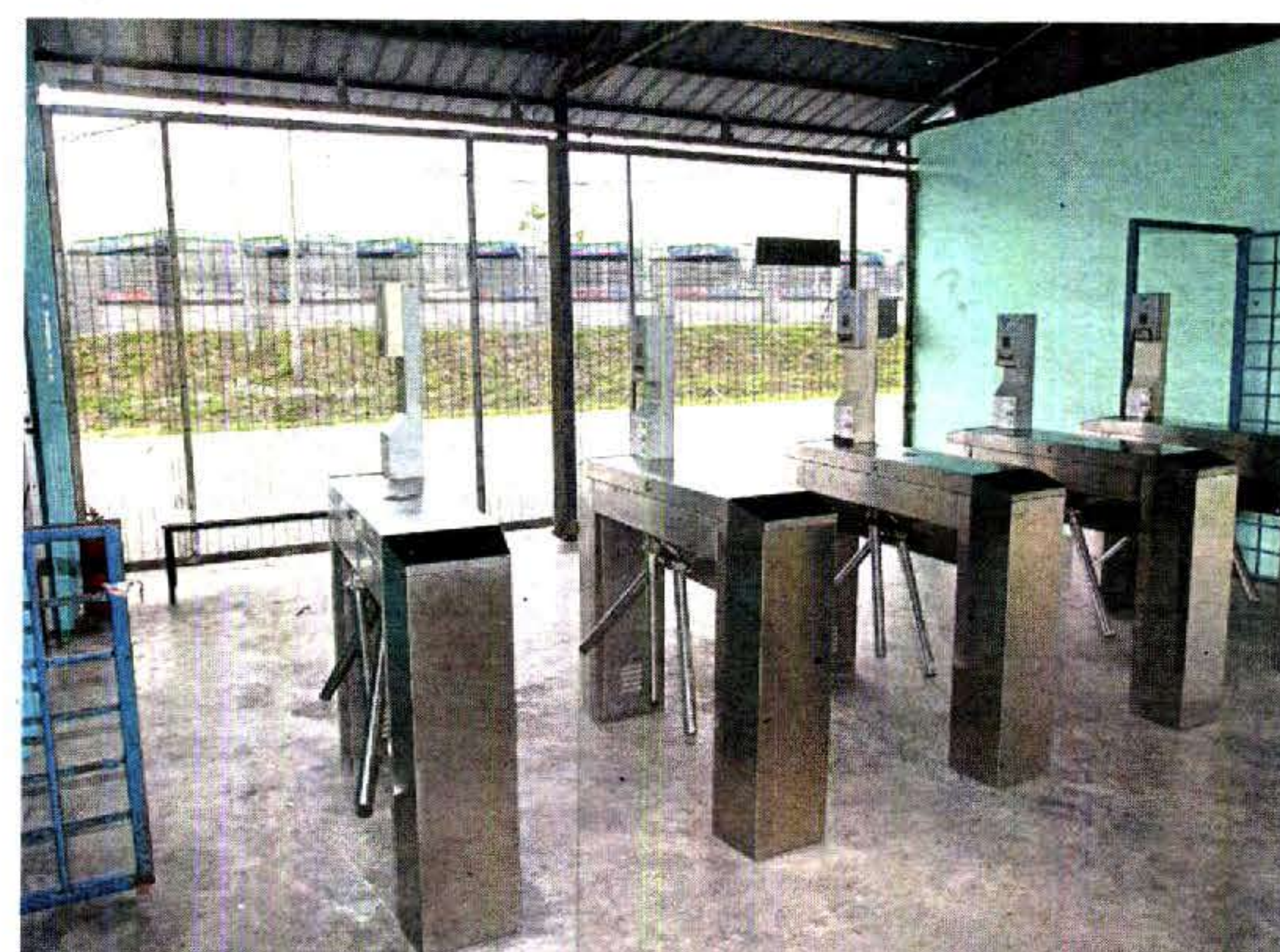
The leasing of CLQ in Sungai Buloh is welcomed by contractors

and developers alike. Master Builders Association Malaysia (MBAM) president Foo Chek Lee said implementation of CLQs was seen as the best way to manage the country's foreign construction workers, as it would allow the employer to house their workers in decent living conditions.

However, he noted that an increase in cost (from rental), limited number of CLQs and their current locations might deter takers.

Foo praised the idea of building satellite CLQs as it could minimise logistics and travelling time, adding that the effort should be carried out in other cities.

"The issue of where to build the CLQ may arise, but with government intervention I am confident it can be overcome," he said, adding that the Government could open up more land and give grants to push this initiative.



Security check at the entrance of the CLQ.



A surau is among the facilities built within the Sungai Buloh CLQ.

He added that the association advocated proper quarters and had been educating its members on its importance, as well as providing the means for employers to house their workers at a reasonable price.

However, he said MBAM was not vested with the power to take action against members who failed to provide satisfactory accommodation.

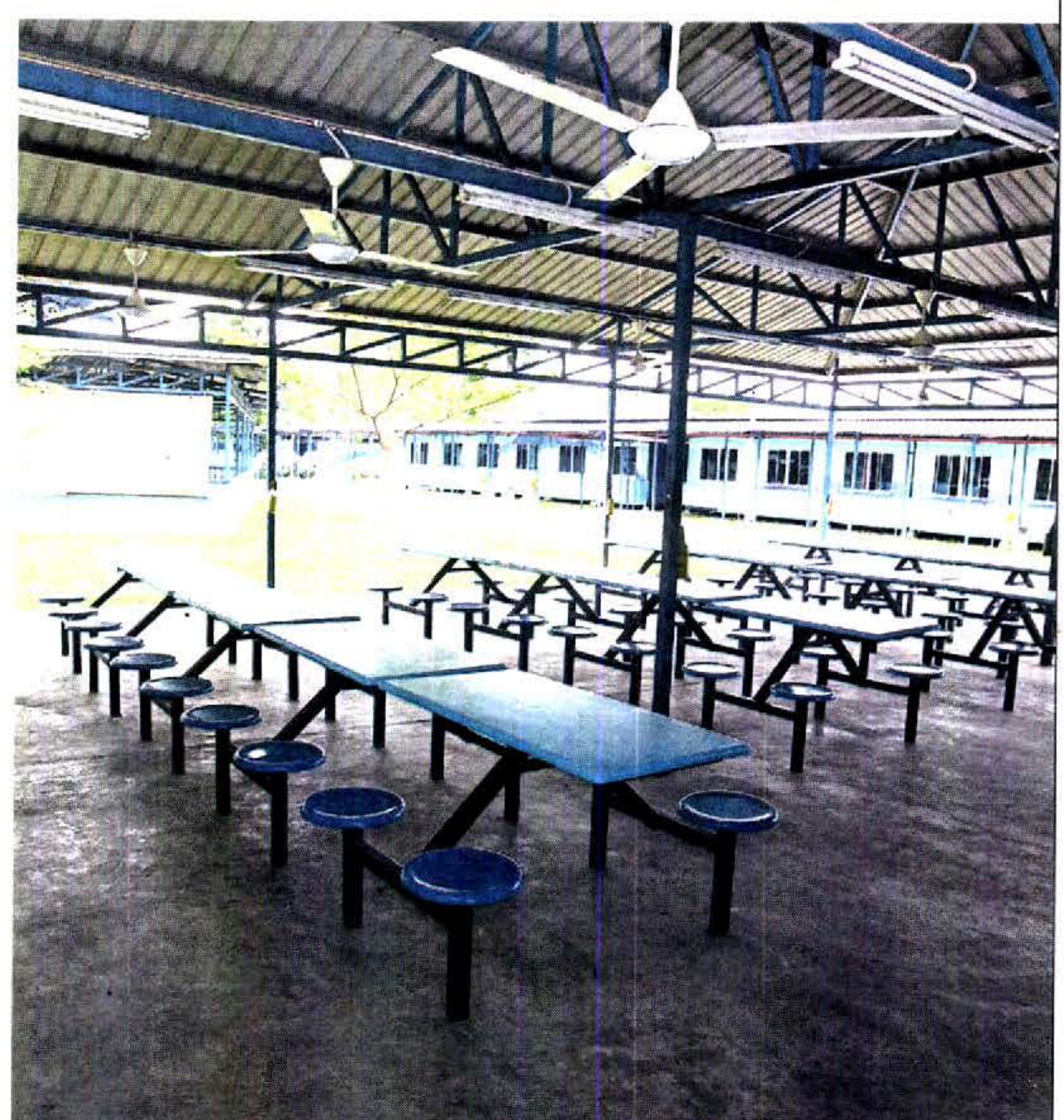
Therefore, he looked forward to amendments to the existing law that stipulates only plantation

companies must provide living quarters for their foreign workers.

"Once the Government amends the law to make it mandatory for all employers to provide an integrated and centralised quarters for their foreign workers, I am confident that the number of cases involving horrendous living conditions will decline," he said.

He added that MBAM was also a member of the committee producing the new guideline on minimal standard of living for their workers.

He said providing a living space close to the construction site had



The canteen area of the CLQ.

Move in the right direction

Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association deputy president Datuk Soam Heng Choon said the availability of CLQs formerly occupied by MRT Corp was a positive step forward and paved the way for employers to actively seek better living arrangements for their workers.

"It is the responsibility of developers and contractors to provide an acceptable and comfortable living space for their workers, whether local or foreign," he emphasised.

He also described the measure to build satellite quarters as "necessary" as the association believed that workers should not be living in cramped spaces like the *kongsi* and the move would benefit developers and contractors who lack the space within their respective developments to provide housing for all its workers.

He said providing a living space close to the construction site had

always been a challenge for many developers, who resort to opting for temporary accommodation at the construction site itself.

"There are also safety concerns when construction workers live within a neighbourhood," he added.

Soam pointed out that developers had been advised to adhere to the Malaysian Standards guideline (MS 2593:2015) that specified the necessary requirements for temporary construction site workers' amenities and accommodations.

He noted that more CLQs would be required to accommodate the high number of foreign workers, as the existing ones were insufficient.

Soam also suggested that CLQ providers look into rent and proximity factors, as costlier rent and a long wait for available units could be a hindrance to employers, while transportation expenses would also discourage them from leasing quarters too far from the construction site.