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A Bernama Year-Ender

FOREIGN WORKERS STILL FLOCK TO MALAYSIA

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KUALA LUMPUR: Rapid developments and the growing affluence among Malaysians continue to draw a steady influx of foreign workers, many illegally, into the country to feed the labour hungry market.

With arrivals increasing by the day, statistics from the Home Ministry (KDN) showed there are now more than 449,000 registered foreign workers in various sectors. Taking into account an equally large number of illegal arrivals, the issue became serious enough to require national attention.

In fact, the government has set up a Cabinet Committee on foreign workers headed by Deputy Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to tackle the problem besides the task of co-ordination to meet the labour needs of the important sectors.

Unfortunately, the presence of these foreigners to earn a very much higher income than in their homelands has led to social problems like murder, fights, robbery, kidnapping and prostitution.

KDN statistics on legal workers also show that Indonesians are in the majority with 249,603, followed by Bangladeshis (160,812), Filipinas (25,359), Thais (5,128), Pakistanis (3,845) and 4,818 other nationalities.

Most of these registered workers work in estates with 75,944, followed by factories (69,833), household as maids (71,254) and construction (69,833).

The Government views the presence of this large number of foreigners as a temporary measure to ease the present labour shortage.

For in the long term, the industrial planning has been geared towards capital intensive modern technologies which will drastically reduce dependence on labour

In this context, the Seventh Malaysia Plan is giving top priority to training a workforce of skilled citizens adept in modern technology. Government and private sector training institutes are joining hands to achieve this target.

Another significant development in the labour scene in 1996 is the closing of ranks among previously bickering trade unions. There was also a tripartite forging of good relations between trade unions, employers and Government.

Workers Day on May 1 saw the dissolution of the Malaysian Labour Organisation (MLO) which was set up seven years ago as an alternative umbrella body for trade unions disenchanted with the attitude of certain leaders of the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC).

The ex-MLO unions returned to the fold for the sake of workers unity, paving the way for MTUC to be the sole body again for private sector unions. The latter's strength of 147 affiliates with 500,000 members also swelled with the inclusion of 19 more unions representing 100,000 members from the MLO.

This development reverts to two main union bodies for the country - MTUC for private sector and CUEPACS for the public sector. The unity among workers and the prevailing harmony between them, their employers and government augurs well for the vision of making Malaysia a developed nation by the year 2020.

Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek, when commenting on the MLO decision, had said this would pave the way for MTUC to play its role in meeting the nation's objective of having a healthy, responsible and

democratic trade union movement.

MTUC President Zainal Rampak who has since left politics to devote full attention to the union movement, had also said the move mirrored the co-operative spirit of promoting workers interest.

He had also said that MTUC wanted close ties with the government, and to resolve any issues without any outside interference. He was subsequently re-elected to the top MTUC post last week.

A good indicator of the existing harmony between the various parties is that throughout the year, workers did not resort to even a single industrial action.

This industrial peace is because disputes are settled by round-table deliberations between union and management with the government playing the role of mediator. Such give and take attitude has prevented the need for drastic action like strikes, which are common in many countries.

For CUEPACS, the emphasis has shifted from the traditional one of requesting for wage revisions and bonuses from the government to becoming partners in the success of the privatisation and corporatisation policy. --  
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