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Amendments will ensure aliens first to be retrenched

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PETALING JAYA, Tues. - Employers are required to first terminate the services of foreign workers in case of retrenchment under proposed amendments to the Employment Act 1955.

Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek said today the amendment was necessary to protect local workers because currently there was no law to prevent employers from giving priority to foreign workers who are cheaper to hire.

"This amendment is also a part of our measures to stop dependence on foreign workers and reducing the out-flow of our money."

Lim was commenting on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement yesterday in Edinburgh, Scotland that foreign workers would be the first to be affected in case of retrenchment due to the current economic situation.

Foreign workers' wages and commissions cost Malaysia over RM4 billion annually.

He said the amendment was expected to be tabled in Parliament early next year.

Speaking to reporters after closing the National Industrial Conference 1997 at the Sunway Lagoon Resort, Lim said the Government had outlined short and long-term plans to tackle the dependency on foreign workers.

"Among the short-term measures we are taking is to tighten the requirements of re-issuing work permits to foreigners.

"The requirements are based on our need for their presence in the various economic sectors."

He added that for long-term measures, the International Trade and Industry Ministry and Primary Industries Ministry would submit recommendations soon to the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Workers.

"We are expecting the recommendations to provide us with further strategies in tackling the problem, especially in the industrial and plantation sectors."

Malaysia is currently hosting over 1.7 million foreign workers including those working illegally.

Earlier, Lim said other than the direct approach of reducing the number of foreign workers, his Ministry planned to enhance the country's capability in producing a sufficient workforce.

"Other than providing various training programmes, we are also proposing several measures to overcome the shortage of places to train our workers such as those in the industrial training institutes.

"We are planning to build 10 new institutes and are also proposing to establish a sponsorship scheme whereby those who qualify but cannot get places would be given loans to pursue their training in private sector institutes."

Also present was Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng, the conference's organising chairman.

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