

27/08/1999

Govt urged to reconsider decision on Indon workers

THE Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) yesterday urged the Government to reconsider its decision to bring in skilled and semi-skilled workers from Indonesia due to the pressing local labour issues awaiting settlement.

The movement wants the Government to fully utilise the local human resources first before bringing in the migrant workers.

"As a matter of priority and policy, available jobs should first be offered to the locals.

"We have more than 250,000 school leavers and 60,000 university graduates entering the job market every year ... more than 40,000 public and private sector workers retire every year upon reaching 55 years," MTUC president Senator Zainal Rampak said in a statement released in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The union is responding to the agreement reached by Malaysian and Indonesian leaders on Wednesday to bring in semi-skilled and skilled Indonesian workers in addition to the unskilled ones into Malaysia.

In a joint news conference with the visiting Indonesian President B.J. Habibie in Putrajaya, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said both countries had also agreed that the entry of these workers be made in a more organised manner.

Zainal said the MTUC has always called upon the Government to extend the statutory retirement age of 55 to 60 so that the skills of qualified, experienced, efficient and capable workers will not be wasted.

"Most of them are young, in good health, have families to support and can work for at least another five years if given the opportunity," he added.

There are also several pressing local labour issues which the MTUC wants the Government to address such as monthly wages and affordable housing for 150,000 plantation, training opportunities for them and their children, minimum wages, National Retrenchment Scheme and possible job losses in the financial sector as a result of bank mergers.

Other issues include employers' non-compliance of collective agreements, non-payment of workers' termination benefits and a host of related matters involving Labour Department and Industrial Relations Department.

Zainal also quoted several policies on the migrant workers as agreed by the Asean (Association of South-East Asian Nations) Trade Union Council (of which MTUC is an affiliate) in several declarations, namely the Cebu (1994), Revised Cebu (1996) and Bali (1997) Declarations.

Among others, the declarations stated that only selective, short-term recruitment of skilled migrant labour should be effected if workers with highly specific skills are not available locally.

He also called on employers to be responsible corporate citizens and help the country to conserve foreign exchange by employing local workers. He said wage remittances of foreign workers amounted to RM3 billion last year.

Zainal added that employers can obtain financial support from the Human Resources Development Fund to train, upgrade and multiple the workers skills in the latest production methods and technology.

"By paying local workers better wages and benefits, employers will also be able to bring about quicker economic recovery through more consumer spending which comes with workers' increased purchasing power.

"This will in turn result in higher profit margins for businesses, and is a win-win situation for the Government, employers and workers," he said.

(END)