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Priority for ex-servicemen (HL)

Sarban Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Employers wanting to recruit foreign workers will now have to first offer the jobs to ex-servicemen, to ensure they are gainfully employed after retiring from the force.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today this was to ensure ex-servicemen, who now number about 350,000 and most of whom retired in their 40s, did not encounter difficulties in getting jobs.

"We have to support the ex-servicemen because they have sacrificed so much to maintain peace and harmony in our country," he said, adding that about 5,000 servicemen retired annually.

(There are about two million legal and illegal foreign workers in the country.)

Opening the 24th annual delegates conference of the Federal Territory Ex-Servicemen's Association, Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said:

"I get tens of thousands of applications to bring in foreign workers because employers claim they cannot get locals to work for them.

"On the other hand, there are some ex-servicemen who find it difficult to get jobs. Pairing ex-servicemen with employers, especially manufacturers, is a good solution to the problem (of worker shortage)."

Abdullah said he would also speak with Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak on ways to set up a pool containing the names of retirees from the force to make it easier for prospective employers to source for workers.

"In this pool, we will have the biodata of those who have retired or are due to retire and the skills they possess.

"These names will then be forwarded to the ex-servicemen's association. If any employer asks me to approve their applications for foreign workers, I will refer them to the association," he said.

These retirees, Abdullah said, would be an asset to any employer as they were well-trained, disciplined and of good character.

He said the prospective employers, particularly manufacturers, would only need to provide suitable training to them.

Such a programme, he said, could also be arranged for retirees from the police force, but it would have to be fine-tuned as they only retired at 55.

Abdullah said the National Economic Action Council, during a meeting two months ago, had also decided to assist ex-servicemen, among others, to venture into business or other undertakings.

"During that meeting, we discussed at length problems faced by ex-servicemen and how to help them as most of them retire from the force in their 40s."

He said one of the decisions taken was to encourage more ex-servicemen to venture into the franchise business.

This, he said, was because one did not need much capital or expertise to run such a venture. The fact that the product to be marketed was already an established name would make it easier for ex-servicemen to manage the business.

"The franchisee, in this case the ex-servicemen, will only need to be given some training and guidance and as such, should be able to run the business well."

He said Datuk Nor Mohamed Yakcop, a special adviser to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, had been entrusted to come up with ideas to "make it easier" for ex-servicemen to become franchisees.

Abdullah said this was one reason why the Government encouraged the setting up of such businesses here as this would in turn help more Malaysians to prosper by becoming franchisees.

"Don't think the Government is not concerned about the plight of the people ... or that we are coming up with all these just after the Al-Ma'unah circus," he said.

Malaysian Ex-Servicemen Association president Datuk Muhammad Ghani, in welcoming the decision for employers to first offer jobs to ex-servicemen, said the Government should formulate a mechanism which would make the registration of ex-servicemen systematic.

"There are more than 100,000 ex-servicemen who are either unemployed or carried out only odd or temporary jobs in the kampungs because they find it difficult to secure employment," he said.

Earlier in his speech, Muhammad said the Defence Ministry had in principle agreed to provide financial assistance to children of serving and ex-servicemen pursuing tertiary education at public universities.

He said those going to universities would be given a RM1,000 one-off payment.

Abdullah also launched a book entitled *Tentera Malaysia Dalam Era Konfrontasi*, written by Mej Syed Osman Syed Omar.

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