

MEF: LET SOME STAY ON

STAR

2 MAR 2001

PETALING JAYA There are certain sectors of the economy which cannot do without foreign workers, the Malaysian Employers Federation said yesterday.

MEF executive director Shamsuddin Bar dan said sectors such as plantation and construction which were unable to attract local workers could be badly affected if foreign workers were sent back.

According to official figures, there were 726,159 foreign workers in Malaysia in 2000. Of this, about 186,000 were in the plantation sector, he said.

The question is whether locals are willing to take up jobs vacated by foreign workers. There will be a mismatch between the supply of local labour and the requirements of employers if a particular sector is unable

to attract locals.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said on Tuesday that if a slow down in the economy resulted in locals being retrenched and not being able to find other jobs, then foreigners employed here would be sent back.

Dr Mahathir also said that a few companies, especially in the electronics sector, were forced to retrench some of their workers or shut down their facilities due to an anticipated slowdown in the United States economy.

Shamsuddin said locals need not worry about their jobs as they were protected under the Employment Act.

● TURN TO PAGE 2

2 MAR 2001
Samy Vellu
Foreigners may be allowed in some sectors

● FROM PAGE ONE

Under the Act, he said, when the workforce needed to be reduced, the first step would be to send back foreign workers.

Though there had been more lay-offs lately, in particular in the electronics sector, Shamsuddin said the figures were not alarming.

In Klang, MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu pointed out that textile shops, hair salons, provision shops and goldsmith outlets had difficulty hiring locals.

He said the Government might thus consider hiring foreigners in these sectors.

The Works Minister said there was no problem in the food business as between 80% and 90% of restaurants and food stalls had enough workers.

Samy Vellu, who earlier opened the Lotus Family Restaurant at Jalan Dato Dollah, praised the management for opening its 15th branch in the country.

Malaysian Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry vice president Datuk Chandrakant A. Avalani welcomed the Prime Minister's statement, saying companies should give priority to locals.

Chandrakant, who is also chairman of the chamber's Malacca branch, urged the Government to ensure that the locals were not victimised by companies.

In Butterworth, Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (northern chairman) Datuk O.K. Lee said manufacturers would try to hire locals who had been retrenched elsewhere.

However, Lee said some companies in Penang had frozen their intake.

He also said manufacturers should be allowed to keep their skilled middle-level expatriates in view of their expertise in certain areas.

In line with government policy, manufacturers would discharge their social responsibility to accommodate retrenched locals, he added.

Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn said his ministry expected between 5,000 and 6,000 workers of factories, especially those exporting products to the US, to be retrenched this year.

The overall situation was under control and was not expected to have adverse effects on the country, he told reporters after chairing the ministry's post-Cabinet meeting.

He said the ministry's weekly labour market report generally showed that manpower supply always exceeded demand.

He said Penang had among the highest number of retrenchments when the multinational company Seagate decided to stop operations at the end of last year, resulting in 4,800 workers losing their jobs.