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Move to create pool of skilled workforce

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THE Government's proposed allocation for training of unemployed graduates and retrenched workers will not only enhance their employability but also create a pool of skilled workforce to boost the country's economy.

Malaysian Trades Union Congress president Senator Zainal Rampak said the measures outlined by the Government in the new RM4.3 billion stimulus package will produce well-trained workers which will benefit companies and the economy in general.

"When the skills of the unemployed graduates and retrenched workers are upgraded, they will assist in faster economic development and the country's shift to the knowledge-based economy," he said when contacted by Business Times in Singapore.

Under the RM4.3 billion stimulus package announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday, the Government has allocated a monthly allowance of RM500 on a temporary basis for 10,000 degree and diploma holders to learn information technology, mathematics and languages. This will cost the Government some RM150 million until the end of 2002.

Besides the monthly allowance, the Government has put aside a total of RM150 million for training retrenched workers.

Employers are supportive of the move as the current economic situation requires workers to have multiple skills.

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsuddin Bardan said workers now should be multi-skilled to enable them to remain employed.

The Government had, at the peak of Asian financial crisis in 1998, set up a RM5 million Training Fund for Retrenched Workers.

Between January and September 1 this year, some 27,000 workers have been laid off, 18,000 of whom were from the manufacturing sector.

Shamsuddin said employers find that fresh graduates are still lacking in communication skills and have weak command of the English language.

According to the National Economic Action Council executive director Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, the allowance for unemployed graduates will be disbursed within the next few weeks.

Meanwhile, Malay Chamber of Commerce Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur) president Datuk Syed Amin Aljeffery said the allocation for training will also benefit workers employed by the small- and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) as the SMEs tend to lay off workers during economic difficulties.

Syed Amin advised the association's members to take advantage of the package such as the RM300 million allocation for upgrading and maintenance work in government buildings and RM1 billion worth of small rural and urban development projects.

He also urged them to take advantage of the RM110 million allocation to intensify efforts to promote tourism.

Malay Contractors Association of Malaysia vice president Datuk Muhammad Muhiyuddin Abdullah said to ensure the objectives of the package are met, relevant authorities should cut red tape in awarding projects so that prompt payment can be made to contractors.

This, he said, will allow contractors to pay the suppliers and complete the jobs on schedule.

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