

Rely less on foreign workers

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Switch to automation, employers advised

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PUTRAJAYA, Mon. — The Government will be more stringent on the hiring of foreign workers to reduce their numbers in the country.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Workers, at its meeting today, agreed on steps to be taken to lessen the nation's dependence on foreign labour, including encouraging employers to switch to automation.

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said stricter rules would be applied to those involved in bringing in workers.

He said they would be made accountable if those brought in created problems.

"While we will continue hiring workers from our usual sources, we want them and their employers to be more responsible," he said.

For future intake, the Government would determine numbers to be taken in and the sectors involved.

Abdullah said he would brief manufacturers tomorrow on measures to be taken pertaining to the employment of foreign labour.

He will be joined by International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn.

The Deputy Prime Minister said the committee also stressed the importance of hiring healthy workers.

It also endorsed the decision to hire workers from 'non-traditional' countries, with the Immigration Department entrusted with the task of identifying them.

On Indonesian workers — the Government recently decided to hire them last after their involvement in riots and disturbances — Abdullah reiterated that those with valid papers and already in the

country would be allowed to continue working until the expiry of their permits.

For employers who have obtained approval to hire Indonesians but had yet to do so, Abdullah said they would be allowed to bring in the workers.

To a question, Abdullah said despite the 'last resort' policy, employers were still allowed to submit applications to hire Indonesians with the authorities having the last say.

Abdullah said the Government had explained to Indonesian officials the reasons behind action taken against their nationals.

"They met Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and it was explained that the action is not against all Indonesians but targeted against trouble-makers."

On trouble caused by Africans in the country and their deportation, Abdullah said there was no discrimination in dealing with workers or nationals from certain countries.

"Whoever commits an offence or crime, action will be taken based on our laws."

On the need to tighten entry regulations for citizens of some African countries, Abdullah said the Foreign Ministry would study the matter in view of current developments.

"There is one African country where half of their nationals who are here to work or as tourists have been found to be involved in activities which are criminal in nature.

"That's why action, like requiring them to apply for visas and tightening its issuance, has to be taken."

Asked about a report in the latest issue of *Time* magazine that Malaysia had been the launching pad for attacks against the United States on Sept 11, he dismissed it as the magazine's pure imagination.