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Foreign workforce to be reduced (HL)

Abdul Razak Ahmad

LANGKAWI, Sun. - Malaysia is determined to reduce the number of foreign workers to stem the outflow of funds and reduce the risk of violence, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said this when asked to comment on a statement by Home Ministry secretary-general Datuk Seri Aseh Che Mat in Ajil, Terengganu, today.

Bername reported Aseh as saying after visiting the Immigration Depot there, that the number of Indonesian workers in this country would be halved from the present 900,000.

"Whether it is a (reduction) to half or not, the thing is that we really have to reduce the number of foreign workers in this country, including those from Indonesia," Dr Mahathir said after giving away prizes for the Third Langkawi Malaysia Ironman triathlon competition at Dataran Lang.

He said although Malaysia required foreign workers, they repatriated a substantial amount of money to their home countries.

"Because of this, jobs should be given to Malaysians as much as possible. Then there will be no outflow of money, and at the same time we will not face the risk of violence such as what happened at the Hualon factory," he said.

Asked whether it would be possible to replace foreign workers, Dr Mahathir said the Government acknowledged that few Malaysians were willing to take up the low-skilled jobs being done by foreigners.

"Even jobs in air-conditioned factories are being done by foreign nationals. As such, we want factories to include more automation to reduce the need for manual labour."

According to Bernama, Aseh said most of the registered Indonesian workers were employed in the construction, manufacturing and plantation sectors and also worked as housemaids.

He said after the reduction exercise, employers could choose workers from Thailand, the Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Vietnam and Laos, and Sri Lanka, too, if they wanted housemaids.

However, the Government might allow employers to take in Indonesians if they were unable to get workers from other countries, he said.

Aseh said the new policy of making Indonesia the last choice for workers would be implemented in two ways.

"Indonesians whose contracts have expired should be replaced with workers from other countries; only if employers were unable to get workers from the other countries would they be allowed to take Indonesians.

"This rule will be relaxed where the applications to take Indonesians have already been approved and payment made," he said.

This regulation would also apply to applications to recruit Indonesians now being processed by the immigration authorities.

"We are only saying do not take Indonesians first ... take others ... we are making Indonesians the last choice," Aseh said.

On the deportation of illegal immigrants, he said the policy of deporting them speedily has been implemented.

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