

Zahid's kin eyes system for 1.5m Bangladeshis

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A firm owned by Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi's brother is in talks with Dhaka and Putrajaya to provide a management system for the 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers Malaysia intends to allow in through a new business-to-business system.

Real Time Networking Sdn Bhd, in which Zahid's brother Abdul Hakim Hamidi is executive chairperson, aims to provide an online system where, for a fee, workers can be registered and monitored from Bangladesh and Malaysia.

Zahid is also home minister, and the approval of foreign workers into Malaysia comes under his ministry's purview.

Real Time's online system - dubbed Workforce Management & Networking System (Workman) - is similar to that provided by Bestinet, a firm owned by former home minister Azmi Khalid.

Bestinet's agreement with the government was suspended earlier this year after outcry by recruitment agents in sending countries over its high service fees.

When contacted, Hakim confirmed that Real Time is eyeing the deal but stresses that it is not a government contract.

Rather, it is in collaboration with the Bangladesh Association of International Recruitment Agencies (Baira), he said.

"We have the model of a system where we get a payment for a package (service) and we can send people (from Bangladesh) for 60,000 Bangladeshi taka (RM3,000), including the air ticket.

"This is not a government contract. Yes, their government need to approve because it involves citizens but they are only monitoring," Hakim said.

If approved, agencies such as the Immigration Department and Manpower Department will be linked to Real Time's system and all recruitment agents must go through Real Time to send workers to Malaysia.

'No issue if brother's minister'

He also refuted any claim of nepotism, arguing that he is experienced in the field.

"My brother is the minister but I am a businessman. It is a democratic country and I can do anything, other than be a drug pusher.

“Malaysians are very difficult. They say if my brother is a minister, I cannot do anything. They want us all to be jobless.

“I have experience in the field and I am an IT man. All these designs are from my brain,” Hakim, who is now in Dhaka, told Malaysiakini.

Hakim has experience in IT operations at Motorola Semiconductors and Tenaga Nasional Bhd and is an executive director of labour supply firm Warisan Juara Padu Sdn Bhd.

Documents show that Real Time was incorporated in March this year.

Hakim is listed as executive chairperson in the Real Time proposal and other correspondence, but he is not registered as an office-bearer with the Companies Commission of Malaysia.

Instead, his son Mohd Akmal, 25, is a director, along with former Home Ministry deputy secretary-general Raja Azahar Raja Abdul Manap, and one Salihah Kasim, 25.

Salihah shares the same address as one Md Abu Hanif Abul Kashem, another director of both Real Time and Warisan Juara Padu.

Md Abu Hanif is a Bangladeshi national and Malaysian permanent resident, according to Bangladeshi newspaper The Daily Star.

Md Abu Hanif is also listed by Baira as an “overseas representative of Baira”, in a letter to Zahid dated June 24, sighted by Malaysiakini.

‘Dhaka very happy’

Hakim is currently in Dhaka to present the new business-to-business system to government officials and Baira.

His visit coincides with official visit by a four-member Malaysian delegation, led by Immigration Department secretary-general Mustafa Ibrahim, which arrived Aug 9 to discuss the recruitment of 1.5 million workers for Malaysia.

According to Hakim, there are at least two other firms vying for the deal, but the Bangladeshi government is keen on the Real Time system.

“I met with Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Nurul Islam on Sunday and he is very happy with our system,” he said.

Baira has also endorsed the system in the June 24 letter.

“We really appreciate Real Time Networking Sdn Bhd to provide a great and wonderful

system called WM25 (Workforce Management & Monitoring System), which we found can sustain smooth operations that will benefit both countries,” Baira president Md Abul Bashar states in the letter.

However, when met last week, Baira vice-president Ali Haider Chowdury said Real Time’s system, although favourable, is one of a few systems offered by private parties for the same purpose.

Chowdury said it would depend on the two governments to decide, and denied that Baira has any stake in Real Time.

“It is totally private,” he told Malaysiakini.

Malaysiakini understands that Bangladesh’s Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment Ministry has also received various proposals and it is weighing up options with the aim of keeping the migration costs of the workers low.

Indonesia, Nepal and The Philippines, too

Real Time presented its proposal to the Malaysian government through a letter to Zahid on June 17, a copy of which was sighted by Malaysiakini.

Zahid’s private secretary Nur Azman Mohd Aminuddin forwarded both Real Time’s June 17 proposal and Baira’s June 25 endorsement to Home Ministry secretary-general Alwi Ibrahim on July 8.

Zahid had, in a handwritten note, instructed Alwi to review the proposal “for comparison”.

Hakim believes his system will “most probably” receive the green light.

“There is no issue with the business-to-business relations, just some modules (in the system) that need some technical tuning.

“If the Bangladesh government accepts it, the Malaysian government will accept it. The receiving country must follow the supplier,” he said.

While the 1.5 million workers is the focus for now, Hakim added, Real Time is also heading to Indonesia, Nepal and The Philippines to propose the same system for the recruitment of workers into Malaysia.