

Suhakam tells gov't to increase anti-trafficking effort
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Malaysia needs a national plan of action to effectively deal with human trafficking and protect victims of people smuggling, said the national human rights group.

It will also need the training of enforcement officers, the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) urged the government.

Malaysia on Thursday tabled the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Bill in Parliament to crack down on human trafficking and prevent the country from being used as a transit point for smuggling people.

The new bill will give greater access for the police, immigration and other authorities to pursue, prosecute and convict human traffickers while protecting victims from criminal prosecution.

"There is a need to ensure victims are protected from discriminative and prejudiced treatment," Suhakam's secretary Ahmad Yusuf Ngah said in a statement.

"As Malaysia often becomes a point of destination and transit of human trafficking syndicates with victims from all continents ... personnel trained with language skills must be made available," he said.

Victims should also be made aware of the risks of being employed by unregistered labour agents while the public should be encouraged to inform authorities of suspected victims of trafficking.

"Protection to whistleblowers would further encourage collective efforts on the part of government agencies and the civil society which would hopefully facilitate in exposing hidden syndicates," Ahmad Yusuf said.

Unscrupulous labour agents

According to a report by the International Organisation for Migration in March last year, trafficking victims in Malaysia are often exploited by unscrupulous labour agents.

They are frequently subjected to physical, psychological and sexual abuse by their employers, it said.

Malaysia is one of Asia's largest importers of labour with foreign workers, both legal and illegal, making up about 2.6 million of the country's 10.5 million workforce.

Before the Bill, illegally trafficked people were detained under a patchwork of legislation, which saw them being held in immigration depots and police cells, alongside criminals.