

The end of mamak stalls?
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Be it during work or leisure, Malaysians enjoy a cuppa teh tarik at the mamak stall, a part and parcel of the nation's social landscape.

But this may soon fade out if the government remains adamant on its foreign workers stance.

presma hiring advertisement banner 030410In January last year, the government banned the hiring of foreign workers in the service and manufacturing sectors amidst the looming economic downturn. The ban still remains.

Foreign workers who have worked for more than five years can no longer renew their permits.

The Malaysian Muslim Restaurant Owners Association (Presma) had initially welcomed the move by offering 25,000 jobs for locals at 6,000 of its restaurants nationwide.

However, its deputy president Kadhar Shah Abdul Razak told Malaysiakini that more than a year on, less than 250 have taken up the offer.

mamak restaurant fiasco 150606 food"We have already tried our best (to support the government's policy), but no locals are willing to work for us," said Kadhar Shah.

Hitting the panic button, Kadhar said that he hopes that the government will reverse the decision.

"If the government does not reconsider, our investments will go down in flames," he added.

Kadhar Shah said that many of the local workers prefer to work at fast food chains rather than at mamak or nasi kandar stalls as it is much a tougher environment.

He warned that in another year's time, many of its restaurants will be forced to shut down if the trend continues.

Closure looms

One such restaurant owner who identified himself as Varusdi, 60, in Bangsar is among many facing this ominous prospect.

Within the next three to six months, the work permits of all seven of his workers, who have worked for more than five years, will expire.

mamak restaurant 271206 signageHis appeals have failed and Varusdi is desperately trying to hire local workers.

"Look at the banner outside, it's been up for two weeks and no one has come in. Not one!" lamented Varusdi, who pointed to a blue metre-long banner calling for cooks and waiters.

He pays his workers about RM800 a month plus food and lodging. Yet no one has even

bothered to inquire.

"The situation doesn't look rosy. If I don't have workers, how am I going to run my shop? I will need to close down, I have no choice," he decried.

'Local workers wouldn't do'

Another mamak restaurant in Brickfields which sported a similar 'workers wanted' banner is also facing the same problems.

Supervisor Sulaiman F, 35 said half of his 20 workers were from India but five have since returned because their permit expired.

mamak restaurant 221204 water man "It isn't a serious problem now because our remaining five foreign workers still have between one to three years but it's obviously tougher than before," he said.

For what he claims as unsatisfactory local workers, Sulaiman said they still have to pay between RM300 to RM500 more compared to the foreigners.

"We have tried to employ local workers. In fact, we had employed eight recently but six have left. They are not serious about their work," he added.

Calls for review

Meanwhile, a nasi campur shop owner in Bangsar, Kak Waty, 39 said that 14 of her 16 workers were from Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Thailand.

While none of her workers are near the five-year threshold, Waty said she is against the policy even though she understands that hiring locals will help the country.

"Our Indonesian workers are more hardworking. The locals don't want such work and when I did hire them, they worked for a few days and then disappeared," she said.

Waty predicted that if the situation persists she too will face problems in future.

Last month, the Malaysian Associated Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MAICCI) president KK Eswaran had also called for work permits be extended for the 90,000 foreign workers its members employ.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has said that he would consider the request, however, Kadhar Shah said on-going discussions with the authorities have not been fruitful so far.

The problem is not confined to just mamak restaurants but also Chinese and other restaurants which employ Burmese and Indonesians as waiters and cooks.

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