

**The Hardships Faced By Sarawakian Workers**  
**MalaysianMirror.com**  
**17 March 2012**  
**By Baru Bian**

There were complaints about working terms and conditions, salaries different from what was promised, and working long hours without overtime. The Labour Department's Senior assistant director Ahmad Lamat said there is nothing much the government can do to help them.

Today's Star highlighted that illegal foreign workers are causing the government to lose millions of ringgit in levy and that foreigners are snapping up jobs shunned by locals. Ahmad Lamat blamed this on the locals being choosy due to unattractive wages.

We need to examine the root cause of these problems:

1. Poor Education policies and amenities

Our people, especially those in the rural areas have little opportunities to complete their school studies and go on to tertiary level.

From the Labour Force Survey (2008-2010) of the Department of Statistics, out of Sarawak's labour force, only 17% or 166,175 people have any form of post secondary education. In fact the projected labour force with post secondary education 2011 (projected from Education and Social Characteristics of the population 2000 and Yearbook of Statistics Sarawak 2009) shows that of the total projected number of 150,690, the ethnic breakdown is as below:

Malay/Melanau: 33.44%

Chinese: 39.49%

Iban: 15.50%

Bidayuh: 7.19%

Orang Ulu: 4.38%

Fatimah Abdullah (Sarawak's Minister of Welfare, Women & Family Development) said we have only 25% (this is significantly higher than the figure from the Department of Statistics for 2008-2010) highly skilled workers to date and that by the year 2015, SCORE is expected to create some 290,880 jobs that would increase to 662,065 jobs by 2020.

From the statistics above, clearly, our people, especially the indigenous people, are in no position to take on the jobs that are purportedly going to be created by SCORE. We will need around twice the number of skilled workers than will be available from the whole of our labour force. The government is actually looking at importing foreign labour to fill these vacancies. How is SCORE going to benefit the people, if this is the scenario?

We need to refocus on the very basic foundation of a successful and vibrant society: Education.

PR government will ensure that every child is given the opportunity to further his or her studies. We will raise standards of teaching, provide training opportunities for teachers, and provide better and more vocational training for school leavers.

## 2. No political will to raise wages.

Foreigners work mainly in Plantations and Construction sites, the majority of which are owned or controlled by the CM's family and cronies, and BN politicians and their families/cronies.

They take the land from the locals for plantations, and then to add insult to injury, offer the lowest wages (around RM18 per day), which is grossly insufficient to sustain even one person, let alone a family.

Ahmad Lamat said 'Our people are choosy, but foreign workers are willing to do the tough work for a few years just to earn a living.'

We cannot blame the people for not wanting these jobs. They have to go to West Malaysia, Singapore and further abroad to make a living. There, they are forced to just 'make a living' by taking on the jobs that West Malaysians and Singaporeans don't want to do.

The point is that our people cannot even earn a living on the wages being offered here. Why should they just be content on earning a living? We should want them to thrive and prosper. The Indonesians live the most frugal lives here so that they can send to their families the little that they make. Our people have families to support, and hence have to seek greener pastures outside of Sarawak.

There are 112,209 legal foreign workers in Sarawak, according to Adenan Satem. That means there are 112, 209 jobs that could be given to locals, if they are paid decent wages which they can live on.

Currently, money generated from plantations and construction projects end up in Indonesia as remittances of the labourers or in the pockets of those who steal from and cheat the rural people.

Is it any wonder that Sarawak is one of the poorest states in the country? Is it any surprise that Fatimah Abdullah said that the number of poor in Sarawak is expected to increase?

The solution is to raise the wages sufficiently so that people can have enough to live on comfortably and to aim for better futures for their children, instead of just struggling to eke out a living.

Pakatan Rakyat wants Sarawak to be the richest state. The only way to do it is to eradicate land grabbing, corruption and cronyism and to refocus on the basics such as education and training, and implement policies of good governance. We have formulated policies that will serve the needs of the people, as set out in the PK Budget 2012 released by Anwar Ibrahim in October 2011. A PR government will work on the premise that the people are the boss and our job will be to implement policies that will improve the lives of the population.

BARU BIAN is Chairman of PKR Sarawak

(The views expressed above belongs to the author in its entirety and does not represent the opinion of Malaysian Mirror in any way)

Copyright © 2012 [www.malaysianmirror.com](http://www.malaysianmirror.com)

<http://www.malaysianmirror.com/media-buzz-detail/6-nation/57028>