

Call to study workers' progress
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KUALA LUMPUR (Jan 24, 2013): A study is needed on the progress of workers trained by accredited private and government skills development centres, to help offset over-dependency on foreign labourers, said DAP National Labour Bureau chief A. Sivanesan.

Sivanesan, a labour lawyer, said the government must also ensure that these centres are equipped to train workers who met demands from specific industries. "There should also be some form of enforcement put in place to track the progress of training programmes conducted," said Sivanesan when met after a demonstration organised by some 20 Indian non-governmental organisations against former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam had on Monday said that the ministry is looking into launching a pilot study to assess marketability of workers trained by the skills providers, as well as the wages earned, to identify areas where their talents are needed and potential for growth.

According to statistics from the Skills Development Department, there are 1,077 accredited training centres as of Dec 30 last year, of which 374 are operated by the government and 619 by the private sector.

A total of 85,697 Malaysian skills certificates were also issued to candidates who successfully underwent the training programmes last year.

Sivanesan's call was also made in response to an ongoing debate over implementation of minimum wage, an issue which he said has been discussed for more than 20 years, and as such, should not have caught employers "by surprise".

The government had in January announced implementation of a RM900 minimum wage for workers in the Peninsula and RM800 in East Malaysia, raising concerns from employers who claimed that the move would increase the cost of hiring foreign workers, as they would also have to cover other fees, including levy charges and allowances.

"The problem here is that the government had jumped the gun to implement a minimum wage, for political reasons, without looking at all potential implications," claimed Sivanesan who is Sungkai state assemblyman.

Sivanesan, as such, said while he personally believes that foreign workers should be excluded from receiving a minimum wage, the disparity in income should not be too great.

Noting that Malaysia is bound to follow international standards and local labour law which forbid discrimination of a worker based on his nationality, race, religion or creed, Sivanesan said the government can either consider setting a "regional" minimum wage – urban, semi-urban and rural – or introduce incentives to assist smaller companies.

Meanwhile, migrant rights group Tenaganita executive director Irene Fernandez claimed it has received complaints of companies who have included costs of hostels and utility bills totaling RM150 per worker as part of their minimum wage calculation.

She said companies have re-organised off-days so that Sunday is taken as a normal working day, thus automatically reducing overtime costs, she said in asserting that such companies give almost no recognition for overtime work.

Fernandez urged the government to stand firm on its decision to implement a standard minimum wage for all workers, excluding costs that must be borne by the employers.

The Cabinet is expected to announce its decision on measures to "assist" employers in implementing the minimum wage within one or two weeks.

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