

**Employers Must Submit Online Applications For Foreign Workers - Ahmad Zahid
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PUTRAJAYA, Aug 18 (Bernama) -- Soon, applications for foreign workers will not involve agents, but the employers must submit their applications online, says Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

He said the online management system of foreign workers would be introduced soon to reduce the time needed to bring them into the country.

Ahmad Zahid, who is also home minister, said the conventional application where the employers were required to go to the ministry's One-Stop Approval Centre took between three and six months.

"However, the online applications will be approved within 48 hours after the application meets the conditions set by the ministry. We have carried out trials and found the system to be more effective.

"The single-window synchronisation system was created so that there is no overlapping and cross-communication between the ministries," he said.

Ahmad Zahid said this after chairing the first Cabinet Committee Meeting on Foreign Workers and Illegal Immigrants, following his appointment as deputy prime minister in the Cabinet reshuffle on July 28.

Asked if the process would be monitored by the home ministry, he said: "Employers will fill up the online forms and the government will look into how many foreign workers are needed.

"After that, the ministry concerned will liaise with the source country which has the list of registered workers to provide the number of workers requested, as well as several pre-conditions such as data and the foreign worker's biometrics which must be complied with, before the delivery process is undertaken."

On agents who were registered with the ministry, Ahmad Zahid said once the online application system was introduced, the employers would cut their costs as the government provided this service free of charge.

Besides online applications, Ahmad Zahid said the two-hour meeting also decided on two other matters relating to foreign workers - to meet the needs of the industry and boost national economic growth.

He said employers would now be required to provide the foreign workers with accommodation based on minimum standards set by the government.

He added that the provision of accommodation by the employers would be made a pre-condition for the approval of applications by employers who intended to bring in foreign workers.

"Centralised housing will be provided with basic amenities like dining area, toilets, prayer centres for different religions for humanitarian reasons, as well as to reduce the risk of social problems and crime."

The deputy prime minister said a pilot housing project had been carried out in Pengerang, Johor to accommodate 10,000 foreign workers in one housing area.

However, he stressed that priority and social safety nets would be given to local workers to be trained as professional and semi-professional employees in certain sectors.

"This is because foreign workers are only performing jobs which the locals are not interested in, as they are deemed as dirty, dangerous and difficult work," he said.

Ahmad Zahid added the meeting also decided that employers observed the principle of strict liability in their intake for foreign workers to ensure they were fully accountable for workers in their employ.

"Accountability begins at the application stage, to salaries and until the foreign worker is returned to his country of origin.

"The employer must also be accountable if the return to the country of origin exceeds the duration (of stay) and if the foreign worker moves to another employer," he said.

He said employers who did not fulfill the conditions would face a penalty, subject to the offence committed.

Meanwhile, Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri Richard Riot, who also attended the meeting said the centralised housing provided for foreign workers must comply with the condition of 4.5-square-metre rooms and a toilet for every five foreign workers.

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