

Plan for 1.5 million Bangladesh workers contradicts 11MP, say groups
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By Yasmin Ramlan

The plan to bring in some 1.5 million workers from Bangladesh to Malaysia in stages over three years contradicts objectives in the 11th Malaysia Plan (11MP) to reduce dependency on low-skilled foreign labour, the country's umbrella body of trade unions said.

Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) secretary-general N. Gopal Kishnam said reliance on foreign workers would not help Malaysia achieve developed nation status by 2020 if locals were left wanting for jobs and better wages.

"I am not in agreement with the government's proposal to bring in 1.5 million (workers from Bangladesh). This is as big as the population in Kelantan. I don't see the reason why we have to do this when we already have so many illegal immigrants," he added.

"Local workers have no hope to find jobs as employers like to hire those they can pay cheaply," he told The Malaysian Insider.

"This always happens and Malaysia will not achieve developed nation status by 2020 where one of the goals is to raise workers' salaries," Gopal added.

In June, Home Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said 1.5 million workers from Bangladesh will be brought to Malaysia to meet the demands of employers from various sectors, especially those that involve "dirty, dangerous and difficult" work.

He said the government had no choice but to do so as Malaysian workers were "choosy" with jobs.

But MTUC fears that reliance on foreign labour would not help push up wages, which have been largely stagnant or seen only marginal growth for working class jobs.

Gopal added that statistics from the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) showed that more than 40% of local workers earned less than RM2,000 per month.

At the same time, more than 65% of households with both husband and wife working, had a combined income of less than RM3,500.

"Will their income be doubled in the next five years?" he said.

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan expressed similar sentiments, adding that job opportunities for locals would be affected with the influx of foreign workers in the country.

"If we take a look at this year, the job market is pretty slow and this we know

especially because the government in the civil sector has made a policy not to hire," he told The Malaysian Insider.

The private sector, meanwhile, has also seen most employers cutting back on new recruitments and opting not to replace workers who have been let go or retired, he added.

"There are companies who are also laying off their employees through the Mutual Separation Scheme (MSS), Voluntary Separation Scheme (VSS) and others.

"So we expect this to continue until the end of the year and it will most probably go on until next year. Job opportunities for new workers will be really scarce," Shamsuddin said.

He also expects the unemployment rate to rise from the present 3.1% if the present situation continued.

Putrajaya has to take a decisive stance and prioritise locals over foreigners, he added.

"Previously, many locals who were on school or semester breaks found it easy to get a part-time job at gas stations or in fast-food outlets and others.

"But the current trend, I have observed, is that locals wanting a temporary job are now being told there are no vacancies," he said.

Pressure from agents

Malaysia's handling of the intake of workers from Bangladesh, however, has been criticised by the country's media for lack of transparency and apparent collusion between the private sector and governments of both countries.

A Bangladesh news portal, The Daily Star, ran a three-part series recently on how government-to-government agreement on the recruitment of Bangladesh workers to Malaysia failed because of pressure from the private sector and agents who stood to lose out from the lucrative business.

It has also been suggested by news portal Malaysiakini, that Zahid's brother, Datuk Abdul Hakim Hamidi, would stand to gain from the plan to bring in 1.5 million workers from Bangladesh through his company which proposes to provide IT services to register, manage and track the hiring of these workers.

Malaysiakini ran its report yesterday on Hakim and his company Real Time Networking Sdn Bhd which is bidding for the deal.

Zahid also heads the Home Ministry which oversees approvals for foreign workers.

But Hakim denied suggestions of nepotism, saying that he was experienced in the IT field.

Malaysiakini reported that he was currently in Dhaka, Bangladesh, to present his company's proposal to the government there.

In a press statement issued to Malaysiakini last night, the Home Ministry said it was still considering the proposal by Real Time Networking, which was among several other local companies bidding for the job. – August 12, 2015.

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