

Government Clears the Air Over 1.5 Million Bangladeshi Workers

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PUTRAJAYA, Feb 19 (Bernama) -- The government Friday cleared up the misconception over the reported recruitment of 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers, stating the figure represented the total number of Bangladeshis registered for jobs in 139 countries.

Human Resource Minister Datuk Seri Richard Riot said 1.5 million Bangladeshis had registered with the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment in Bangladesh for jobs overseas including Malaysia.

It had been reported earlier that Malaysia would recruit 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers over the next three to five years.

Riot said the memorandum of understanding between the Malaysian and Bangladesh governments he had signed in Dhaka yesterday did not specify the number of Bangladeshi workers to be employed in Malaysia.

"The number (of Bangladeshi workers) to be brought in will depend on the demand from (Malaysian) employers," he told a press conference here.

"Let's say a company needs 1,000 workers, then the company will apply for that certain number of workers. So, it depends on the demand in the local industry," he said.

Riot and Bangladesh Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Nurul Islam signed the MoU in Dhaka yesterday that provides for Malaysia to recruit Bangladeshi workers in stages over the next five years. Riot, who returned to Malaysia at 4.30am today, said the MoU with Bangladesh was just like any other MoU on foreign workers that Malaysia had inked with other source countries.

The Malaysian government had entered into MoUs with seven other source countries, namely Indonesia, Thailand, India, Cambodia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, he said.

Riot said the Malaysia-Bangladesh MoU was for a five-year recruitment and would be subjected to a review after that period.

The G to G plus MoU was also stricter as potential Bangladeshi workers would be vetted for criminal activities and subjected to health screening before they were permitted to enter and work in Malaysia, he said. Riot said the employers would have to apply for Bangladeshi workers through an online system called the Bangladesh Workers Management System (BWMS) managed by the Home Ministry.

"There will be no element of monopoly whatsoever in the MoU," he said as he flashed pages of the MoU when replying to a question on reports claiming monopoly in the hiring of Bangladeshi workers.

"The MoU stipulates that the Malaysian government shall ensure transparency and fairness in the online system for the selection of Bangladesh recruitment agencies and the distribution of quota," he said.

Asked about the extent of demand for Bangladeshi workers, Riot said: "Actual number, we don't know. It depends on the demand but priority (for jobs) must be given to local workers, that's important," he said.

To a question, Riot stressed that the entry of foreign workers was based on industry demand and the government was taking the necessary measures to keep the maximum figure capped at 15 per cent of the country's total workforce.

With the total workforce in the country currently at 15.3 million, 15 per cent of that would total 2.3 million foreign workers, he said.

As of December last year, he said the total number of documented foreign workers in Malaysia was 2,135,035.

Riot said it was estimated that for every 10 legal foreign workers there would be eight undocumented foreign workers and, this meant, there were about 1.7 million undocumented foreign workers in the country.

He said the government was trying "our level best" not to exceed the 15 per cent and added that it was taking the necessary measures to ensure more enforcement against and deportation of illegal workers.

Riot said the Human Resource Ministry was in the midst of conducting a study on Malaysia's demand for foreign workers through its Institute of Labour Market Information and Analysis.

"The study has been going on for the last four to five months and we hope to complete it in the next few weeks," he said.

Riot said that though Malaysia did not want to be overly dependent on foreign workers, it still needed them in sectors such as manufacturing, plantation, agriculture, construction and services.

Currently, he said, there were 282,287 legal Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia and, of the total, 109,743 were in the construction sector; 104,311, manufacturing; 32,609, services; 21,253, plantation and 14,371, agriculture. On other source countries, he said Indonesia topped the list with 828,283 workers, followed by Nepal (526,933); Cambodia (143,056); India (136,435) and Myanmar (8,548), among others. -- BERNAMA

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