

Transform 3D Sectors To Lure More Local Workers, Government Told

By Nur Aimidiyana Zuher

KUALA LUMPUR, (Bernama) – Better salary schemes and working conditions in 3D (dangerous, dirty and difficult) sectors may induce more Malaysian youths to look for employment in those fields.

But, more importantly, it is high time the public changes its perception towards such jobs as it will help to remove the stigma attached to "manual" jobs, say leaders of various organisations.

And, while the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) contends that salaries paid to skilled 3D workers should commensurate with their qualifications, youths with neither the skills nor academic qualifications have no choice but to settle for the government-imposed minimum monthly wage of RM900.

There is a tendency for employers to pay the minimum wage to most workers in the 3D sectors but, as MEF Executive Director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan pointed out, those holding the Malaysian Skills Certificate or other relevant qualifications should be paid higher.

"No value is being given to whatever certificates that these workers may have. It will be a good thing to certify their skills and for the employers to pay them in accordance with their level of certification. The minimum wage should only be applied to foreign workers," he said.

REFORM 3D SECTORS

Shamsuddin said the perception that 3D jobs were risky and fraught with danger was keeping Malaysians away from such jobs, resulting in labour shortages in those sectors.

"But the jobs are not as dangerous as many make them out to be. For instance, harvesting oil palm fruits or tapping rubber can hardly be deemed as life-threatening... the same goes for construction and factory jobs.

"People don't like taking up those jobs because of the uncomfortable, hot and dirty working conditions," he told Bernama.

Shamsuddin urged employers in 3D sectors to continuously upgrade working conditions and their safety aspects as well, in order to minimise occupational risks and attract more Malaysians to join their workforce.

On Feb 19, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi had announced a freeze on the intake of foreign workers from all source countries to enable the government to review the two-tier levy programme and focus on the existing illegal workers in the country.

Malay Consultative Council Secretary-General Datuk Dr Hassan Mad called for the reformation of the 3D sectors to enable their activities to become more mechanised and automated which, he said, would not only reduce the nation's dependence on foreign labour but also lure more Malaysians to work in those sectors.

He said the Economic Planning Unit should draft a national manpower master plan for the transition of labour-intensive activities to mechanised and automated operations.

"The time is ripe for the government to carry out a comprehensive study in order to reduce the nation's dependence on foreign labour," he said, adding that there was a pressing need for such a study in view of Malaysia's intention to attain high-income status by 2020.

He said the government should help to create a highly-skilled local workforce capable of handling mechanical and automated jobs.

"It's important to have skilled manpower if we wish to modernise existing technologies and we must source for expertise from among our citizens," he said.

ONE-STOP CENTRE

Institute for Youth Research Malaysia Chief Executive Officer Dr Wasitah Mohd Yusof, meanwhile, suggested that one-stop centres be set up throughout the country to help youths to find employment.

"There are youths, especially those in rural areas, who are not sure how to go about finding jobs. So, the one-stop centres can help these job-seekers to find employment opportunities in any sector easily and effectively," she said.

The Manpower Department, various government agencies, non-governmental agencies and youth organisations could be roped in to help run the centres, she said, adding that the facility would eventually help to reduce the nation's dependence on foreign workers.

Admitting that many Malaysians were confused over the nature of 3D jobs and perceived them as only fit for foreigners, Wasitah said: "Our youths are not interested in those jobs as we're not promoting the opportunities available in the 3D sectors."

On the commonly held belief that Malaysians were not keen to work in the 3D sectors due to the low wages offered, Malaysian Indian Muslim Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Datuk Syed Jamarulkhan S. Kadir said he did not think this was the case.

"We employers don't mind paying higher wages to the locals but the question is, are they really interested in doing 3D jobs," he asked.

Dismissing allegations that employers were taking advantage of lax employment conditions to hire foreign workers, Syed Jamarulkhan said: "We've to go through a certain process first to get approval from the Home Affairs Ministry and the relevant departments. We also have to make an application (for workers) to the Manpower Department, which in turn will advertise the vacancies.

"Malaysians are always given preference to fill the vacancies but if there's no response (from Malaysians) after a month, only then will our application to hire foreign workers be approved. Hence, an employer's request for foreign labour is only approved after it's established that the request is genuine," he said.

He added that costs involving the levy on the foreign workers and their health screening were borne by the employers, who also have to pay their workers the minimum wage.

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