

MEF urges govt to obtain foreign workers

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(Photo by Mohd Suhaimi Mohamed Yusuf/The Edge)

KUALA LUMPUR (April 5): The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) said the availability of foreign workers still remains a critical factor in bringing industry fully up to speed despite increased process automation, mechanisation and digitalisation in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a statement today, MEF president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman said despite the government's best efforts in response to employers' calls for financial support and other assistance, there is a shortage of foreign workers.

“With the gradual removal of movement restrictions and cash flow assistance, employers are now trying to regain business traction, but there are still many economic activities that cannot run fully because the manpower required is not there,” he said.

“Many MEF members are appealing for these resources to get their business going because there are no workers. This situation cuts across the construction, plantation, manufacturing and services sectors. For example, the plantation sector reported a shortage of 40,000 workers and lost RM10 billion in 2020 — and these losses are not recoverable.”

The MEF said there were around 1.38 million legal foreign workers in Malaysia as of November 2020. Only 30,000 were registered under the foreign workers' recalibration programme.

Syed Hussain said employers had no choice but to depend on foreign workers even though the cost of hiring foreign workers is much higher than hiring local workers — up to RM15,000 to RM20,000 per foreign worker.

He also said the government should ensure efficient regulation on foreign workers and manage them instead of imposing restrictions that are difficult to enforce.

Syed Hussain also called on the government to urgently set up a special task force on foreign workers, adding that there are capable expertise and experience in the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Human Resources to look into the matter.

"The MEF is willing to support in any manner if required," he said.

Edited by Surin Murugiah