

# MEF: Foreign worker issue needs to be addressed urgently for sake of Malaysia's recovery

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**KUALA LUMPUR (Sept 27):** Malaysia's economic recovery efforts will be severely jeopardised if employers are not provided with the necessary workers to perform the work, especially in sectors that are still dependent on foreign workers, according to the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF).

In a statement on Monday, MEF called on the government to urgently address the situation by allowing such sectors to have their foreign workers.

"We thank Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri M Saravanan for recently engaging with stakeholder representatives on the issue of shortage of foreign workers.

"While employers are eager to regain business traction, they are very frustrated for not being able to engage the necessary workers as locals still shun the work performed by foreign workers. This is despite the fact that more than 500,000 Malaysians are currently unemployed.

"Employers have exhausted all avenues to get the necessary workers including the recalibration programme but to no avail," said MEF president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman.

Syed Hussain said employers understand that foreign workers are a sensitive topic. "However, we must accept that not all industries can adopt IR 4.0 technology due to the nature of the production process, such as furniture manufacturing.

"The jobs of foreign workers must only be for blue collar work, as the employer recognises that supervisory roles should be given to locals. We cannot mix the local unemployment issues with these sectoral issues, especially 3D jobs. We must accept this reality and address it urgently for the sake of our economy," he stressed.

To address this issue, he said red tape needs to be reduced, including for domestic workers who are required to support employees to take care of children and aged parents, as they are going back to work, especially when more sectors have started.

"We must realise the issue is not about foreign labour in selected industries because this is about the national economy. If these sectors fail to produce then our overall national economy will suffer," he said.

On the issue of forced labour, he said the majority of employers are responsible employers who take good care of their employees but the organisation does not rule out that there would be isolated cases where irresponsible employers cause issues.

MEF condemns such irresponsible employers who are tarnishing the country's image and have proposed that the government impose heavy penalties on them, he added.

*Edited by Tan Choe Choe*