

Visa fee hike leaves Indonesian agents boiling mad

Indonesian agents threaten to stop sending workers to Malaysia following a ridiculous rise in visa fees.

PETALING JAYA: The visa processing fee for Indonesian workers under a new system has gone up more than 16 times, from RM15 to RM250, after being outsourced to a private company, The Star reported.

The new fee structure was imposed last month under the Foreign Workers Centralised Management System (FWCMS), which has one-stop centres in Jakarta, Medan, Pekanbaru, and Pontianak to process visa applications.



Earlier, the Immigration Department's website had announced that online applications for Visa with Reference (VDR) for all foreign workers entering the country had to be processed through the FWCMS.

VDR is required for foreign workers applying for work permits, student permits, or professional passes in Malaysia.

The fees are borne by the workers, except in the case of domestic maids.

Run by private firm, Bestinet Sdn Bhd, the system is designed to handle the process of recruiting, managing, and monitoring migrant workers through security screening and biometric profiling.

The Immigration Department's deputy director-general, Sakib Kusmi, claimed the FWCMS was meant to improve the efficiency of the process of acquiring foreign labour.

Meanwhile, Malaysian Ambassador to Indonesia, Zahrain Mohamed Hashim, felt the fees were "fair" as the company's costs included conducting background checks to prevent forgery and fraud.

But Asosiasi Perusahaan Jasa Tenaga Kerja Indonesia (Apjati), Indonesia's largest association of private recruitment agencies, which sends more than 150,000 Indonesian workers to Malaysia each year, is furious with the price hike.

Apjati president Ayub Basalamah estimated the additional cost to be in the region of RM34.5 million.

"What's worse is that, in addition to paying the new RM250 processing fee, the previous RM15 and other minor charges, we have to provide details of our workers to a private company instead of to the Malaysian embassy," argued Ayub.

Sakib explained that the Immigration Department, and not Bestinet, was in charge of all information obtained through the FWCMS which would be kept confidential.

Not so easily appeased, Apjati had written to the Indonesian Parliament and the country's Human Resources and Foreign ministries to immediately halt sending workers to Malaysia.

Ayub exclaimed, "It is an exploitation of our citizens. Malaysia should have negotiated with our government first."

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsuddin Bardan pointed out that although the processing fees were borne by the workers, the cost would ultimately be passed to the employer.

"It is surprising that this action was taken by our own government, to make employment of foreign workers more costly," he remarked.

Meanwhile, Zahrain claimed that the embassy had been instructed by the Home Ministry to outsource the visa processing.

According to The Malaysian Insider, unhappiness over Bestinet handling work previously carried out by the Immigration Department had deepened following revelations that the private firm's directors were former Home Minister, Azmi Khalid, and Tengku Omar Tengku Bot, who was previously director of the Labour Department.