

Good pay alone won't draw Malaysians to 3D jobs, says economist

By **Nicholas Chung** - November 4, 2020 7:30 AM



Economist Carmelo Ferlito says it is not easy for workers to switch jobs.

PETALING JAYA: It will take more than just better salaries to make Malaysians accept menial jobs in the plantation and commodity sectors, according to an economist.

Centre for Market Education Malaysia CEO Carmelo Ferlito said Malaysia was one of several countries in which citizens had managed to avoid so-called 3D (dirty, dangerous, difficult) jobs because of the import of labour.

He told FMT this meant the country had achieved some wealth and citizens' personal expectations would be frustrated if they had to take up 3D jobs.

"In order to convert a white-collar worker to a blue-collar worker, he needs to be desperate in the absolute need to feed his family," he said. "Otherwise, he will try all other options."



Carmelo Ferlito.

He said former white-collar workers would rather become a Grab driver than do a 3D job.

"They probably can get the same amount of money for less effort or a cleaner effort, so to speak," he said.

"I understand the government's concern. It's telling the people to accept any kind of job if they are unemployed. This makes sense, but the situation is less automatic than it would appear."

He said it would not be easy for workers to switch industries and recommended that Putrajaya replace its strategy of containment with a strategy for recovery by

focusing on getting white-collar workers re-employed in their original fields.

"It's not easy to switch workers and labourers among different industries," he said. "Adaptation can happen only over a long period of time."

However, Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsuddin Bardan said it would be better for Malaysians to replace the foreign workforce in the plantation industry.



Shamsuddin Bardan.

He said Indonesia, where a large portion of workers in the sector come from, was now offering competitive wages in its own palm oil sector, making it difficult for Malaysian plantations to attract workers from there.

Nonetheless, he said, the social stigma attached to jobs in the sector was a main deterrent to Malaysians, making it a "very critical" issue for Putrajaya to address.

"The government can hold awareness campaigns so that the sector becomes more attractive to Malaysians," he said.

Shamsuddin said not many Malaysians knew that working in plantations meant being offered good housing facilities with free water and electricity and plots of land for farming.

He said the proposal to issue temporary work passes to undocumented migrants who were already in the country was good only as a short-term measure.

Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister Mohd Khairuddin Aman Razali recently urged Malaysians to fill the void left by foreign workers in the plantation and commodity industries, saying the shortage of manpower in the two sectors was critical.

He said it was appropriate to limit the hiring of migrant workers when many Malaysians were losing their jobs.