

Warning of billions in losses, employers repeat call to allow migrants to work

Staff Writers

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Industry and government data shows that Malaysia lacks at least 1.2 million workers across the manufacturing, plantation and construction sectors.

The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) today repeated its call for migrants to be allowed to work, warning of billions in losses due to a general shortage of labour even as opportunities abound across economic sectors in the country.

MEF president Syed Hussain Syed Husman said Malaysia stood to benefit greatly from the high commodity prices and increasing demand for manufactured goods, in addition to areas in the services sector such as travel and tourism.

“But MEF is very concerned that our industries may not be able to fully capitalise on the current high demand for our commodities, manufactured goods and services due to the difficult business environment arising from the shortage of workers, especially foreign workers,” he said.

“Opportunities such as this do not very come our way very often.”

The Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers, which represents over 3,500 companies, recently said that despite the “greater optimism in outlook and increase in sales, some companies are gravely hampered in their ability to fulfil orders”.

Players in the palm oil sector meanwhile described their situation as being “at breaking point”.

Citing industry and government data, Reuters reported that Malaysia lacks at least 1.2 million workers across the manufacturing, plantation and construction sectors.

MEF had suggested in April that the government allow the recruitment of foreign workers from among refugees and undocumented migrants already in the country to help tackle the shortage of labour.

“These people with the special approval of the government can be deployed immediately to fill up the acute shortage until the new foreign workers finally arrive,” it said, citing losses of more than RM30 billion in the plantations industry alone due to a shortage of harvesters.

Speaking today, Syed Hussain voiced concern over the continuing shortage of labour and its impact on industries across the board.

“Companies are losing billions of ringgit because of the delays and as businesses, we cannot understand the reason for this situation,” he said.

In a statement, he said employers needed “quick solutions”.

“MEF had on many previous occasions proposed short-term measures through the utilisation of UNHCR cardholders, simplifying the procedures for the recalibration of illegal immigrants and other sources of available labour to address these issues. But no proper response was obtained.”