

Move to employ paroled prisoners lauded

Muhammad Yusry

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PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Employer Federation (MEF) is of the view that the government's initiative of possibly using paroled prisoners in work programmes as a positive move.

If launched, some 80% of the 10,000 prisoners will be included in programmes, such as the Parole System Programme, Licensed Release of Prisoners Programme, and Resident Reintegration Programme.

These programmes will place the paroled prisoners in industries to fill vacancies, thus become gainfully employed and serve as an additional labour resource for the country.

"These inmates are citizens. They have committed mistakes in life, but that should not stop them from getting a second chance to become successful and return to society as productive people," said MEF president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman (*pix*).

However, Syed Hussain said not all jobs are suitable for paroled inmates. Their skills and ability to master new ones have also to be considered.

Hence, such inmates will not necessarily replace foreign labour.

"Normally, foreign workers perform mostly dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs, which are mostly manual and require strength and endurance, such as in construction, plantations, agriculture and restaurants.

"It is best not to limit paroled inmates to replacing foreigners. Instead, they should be offered better opportunities," he told the Sun.

Last year, Deputy Home Minister Ismail Mohamed told the Dewan Rakyat that almost two million prisoners had been released since 2011. Before their release, they were taught various skills to be gainfully employed.

The Prisons Department had a "smart partnership programme" with the private sector to offer job opportunities to freed prisoners. The programmes were to ensure that former inmates could lead a normal life without being discriminated against by the community.

Syed Hussain stressed that employers should not worry about hiring ex-convicts from prison programmes as they are not hard core criminals.

"Every citizen, including paroled inmates, are a national asset, so let's not judge them solely on their past deeds."

He said the government and private sectors should work hard to ensure these people succeed in life and return to society as productive people.