

Foreign worker exchange to solve manpower shortage



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THE Employer Exchange Programme – which allows companies to hand over their foreign labours to other firms that are experiencing shortage in manpower – is expected to provide a respite needed by employers who are experiencing acute workforce shortage.

Malaysian Employers Federation director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said many companies are now in dire need of such flexibility to ensure the continuous supply of manpower without raising Malaysia's dependency on foreign labour.

The programme would also alleviate any distress faced by employers who are struggling with financial drawbacks, particularly during the current economic downturn.

“It is a good idea as the main employer doesn’t have to retrench their employees. When things are coming back to normal, the employees could be called back and resume their duties, or they could be permanently employed by the other company.

“The nature of business is that it is fluctuating, even without Covid-19. If we have that kind of flexibility, then there is no need for foreign workers to be sent back,” he told *The Malaysian Reserve*.

Shamsuddin said the mechanism has been long practised by firms in other countries, such as in Japan, which allows employees to work in other companies on a secondment basis.

He added that the mechanism is a cost-saving measure as no additional cost of hiring is required.

“It is good for the employers as there will be no additional cost of hiring. They can just continue from where they are.

“It is also not easy to get approval for foreign workers as there are a lot of red tapes. This is what we have been proposing to the government, instead of the current practice of sending foreign workers home,” he said.

In a Dewan Rakyat’s written reply dated Nov 30, 2020, the Human Resources Ministry said the government has been implementing the programme since June 10, 2020, to assist employers who are unable to continue employing foreign labours by handing over the worker to new employers, either in the same or different sectors.

The process is being managed by the Department of Labour of Peninsular Malaysia and the Home Affairs Ministry.

Malaysia has been experiencing a long-standing issue of labour shortage, whether in the plantation industry or other sectors that are reliant on manual labour.

Earlier this year, Malaysian Palm Oil Association CEO Datuk Mohamad Nageeb Wahab said the domestic plantation industry will lose up to 25% of its potential palm oil yield due to insufficient manpower.

Yesterday, Deputy Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wee Jeck Seng told Dewan Rakyat that the government is deploying two methods to temporarily resolve the shortage of foreign workers, including the exchange programme.

He added that the government has launched the Illegal Immigrant Recalibration Plan, which began on Nov 16, 2020, until June 30, 2021, consisting of two main programmes – Return Recalibration Programme and Labour Recalibration Programme.

He was responding to a query by Shaharizukirnain Abd Kadir (PAS-Setiu) on the ministry’s plan to address the major impact of the reduction of foreign workers in the plantation sector.

The Return Recalibration Programme permits illegal immigrants to return to their home countries voluntarily under certain conditions, while the Labour Recalibration Programme would allow for illegal immigrants to be hired as legal foreign workers and employed by qualified employers.

“The ministry will enhance its efforts to fill up the gap of labour shortage in the plantation industry through campaigns that invite more locals, including the indigenous people, to work in this sector,” Wee said.