



Oil palm plantations are facing an acute shortage of workers to harvest fruit. FILE PIC

LABOUR SHORTAGE

'SEEK ALTERNATIVES TO INDONESIAN WORKERS'

Recruit in other countries or use refugees and prisoners, says MEF

NOR AIN MOHAMED RADHI
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

EMPLOYERS are urging the government to bring in workers from other countries apart from Indonesia to resolve the labour shortage in Malaysia.

They believe that any delay in securing workers from Indonesia should prompt the authorities to explore getting labourers from other countries.

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman said given that it was now harder to recruit workers from Indonesia, the government should look at countries such as Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

"The Malaysian business community has spent a lot of time and resources to fill the shortages, but to no avail.

"With the higher global demand for Malaysian products and services, every second of delay translates into a loss of revenue for businesses and the government. Employers need the new workers urgently to assist in their recovery efforts and put their businesses on the right path," he told the *New Straits Times*.

MEF in April had said that employers were facing a severe

shortage of foreign workers due to the freeze on recruitment imposed in 2020 and 2021, at the height of Covid-19 infections.

It had cited the oil palm sector as an example, saying that any delay in harvesting would lead to losses, and that the plantation industry had lost more than RM30 billion due to the shortage of harvesters.

It had noted a similar shortage in manufacturing, tourism, retail services and construction.

Syed Hussain said there was a delay in the arrival of workers from Indonesia.

Last week, 164 workers from Lombok, Indonesia were scheduled to arrive in Malaysia. They would have been the first batch of workers since the freeze on foreign worker recruitment was lifted this year. However, they were barred from entering due to visa and documentation problems.

Syed Hussain said at the end of last year, there were about 563,000 legal Indonesian workers in Malaysia.

He said there were about 1.17 million foreign workers in the country, down from about 1.7 million before the pandemic.

Syed Hussain also reiterated MEF's proposal that the authorities approve the use of labour currently available in the country, such as refugees.

"We can source the required labour from among the refugees, undocumented foreign workers here and prisoners (who committed) minor crimes.

"These people, with the special approval of the government, can be deployed immediately to fill the acute shortage until the new foreign workers arrive.

"We need to look for quick solutions until all issues on foreign labour recruitment are resolved."

It was reported that about 168,000 refugees have United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees cards and over 60 per cent of them were employable, he said.

Indonesian ambassador to Malaysia, Hermono, said his government would hold a meeting, to be chaired by the Presidential Secretariat, to iron out problems. He said among the items to be discussed was the type of visa to be issued to workers.

"We will sort out the misunderstanding on the type of visa, as there is a difference between the old model (sticker-based) and the new one (stamp-based).

"In the new one, there is a remark saying 'Not Permitted to Engage in Any Employment or Professional Occupation'.

"This remark has caused confusion in the people on the ground. We want to solve this confusion as soon as possible for the mutual benefit of both parties, be they employers or employees," he told the NST.

"I believe that we can start sending the workers within this month."



Datuk Dr Syed
Hussain Syed
Husman

Page 1 pic: Foreign workers at a construction site in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, early this year.