Rebrand jobs left by migrants to attract locals, says bosses group

Soo Wern Jun
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MEF’s Shamsuiddin Bardan says local workers need to be attracted to jobs previously taken by foreigners through good pay and reskilling.

MEF executive director Shamsuiddin Bardan says there is a stigma against taking jobs usually associated with foreign workers. (Bernama pic)

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) has proposed that the government undertake any plan to reduce foreign workers in stages, while also making the vacated jobs attractive for locals.

“The major thing that needs to be done now is to rebrand jobs once done by foreign workers. In the long run, we should be able to harness our own local workers to take up these jobs,” said MEF executive director Shamsuiddin Bardan.

He said with cooperation from employers and the necessary reskilling of locals, the labour market would be ready to reduce dependency on foreigners.

Speaking to FMT, he said there was also a need for more mechanisation and automation for that purpose.

“Of course, a lot of investment is needed for this change, but if the government is able to work out a mechanism whereby employers can enjoy tax-free benefits, then it can be done.”

Yesterday, Human Resources Minister M Kulasegaran said all agreements on the intake of foreign workers would be reviewed, including a 2016 deal by the previous Barisan Nasional government to employ 1.5 million Bangladeshis.

However, referring to concerns over the reluctance of local workers to take jobs usually done by migrant workers, Kulasegaran said the ministry had no plan to raise wages.

Shamsuiddin said it was wrong to think that jobs left behind by foreign workers could only give low pay.
“It is not the case. For example, in the plantation sector, if you are a harvester you could earn a RM2,000 salary and be offered a three-room-accommodation.

“But what is happening now is that everyone has a stigma against working in the plantation sector. They are worried that people will discriminate against them.”

He said the government must be more innovative in rebranding such jobs, giving the example of how, in the past, not many had been interested in becoming cooks.

“But with all these cooking programmes like MasterChef now available, people’s mindsets have changed.

“If you ask around, culinary schools can’t handle the volume of applications for their courses,” he added.

Shamsuddin also said illegal foreign workers were getting “bolder” in their activities, with many even setting up shops through crowd-funding among their own people.

“This is getting worse and it is very bad for local workers. Such so-called self-employment by illegal foreign workers should be dealt with seriously,” he said.