Don’t get conned, Malaysians warned

NATION

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PETALING JAYA: From “interviews” in coffeeshops to being persuaded to work in war-torn countries with lucrative salaries, Malaysians are being increasingly conned into travelling to work overseas, only to run into trouble.

This has prompted the Labour Department to advise those wishing to work overseas to only use the services of licensed private recruitment companies.

Seeking the services of licensed private job agencies under the Labour Department as provided in the Private Employment Agencies Act (1981) would help one avoid being conned or exploited by unscrupulous agents or employers overseas, it said.

“There’s a possibility that high salaries offered has become a pull factor in enticing Malaysians to work overseas.

“The Labour Department is always carrying out enforcement activities under the Private Employment Agencies Act (1981) to monitor the activities of illegitimate agencies and agents,” it said in response to questions by The Star.

The Labour Department, which is under the Human Resources Ministry, was responding to queries about the increasing media reports highlighting Malaysians being conned in overseas jobs.

While the Labour Department said it did not have any records on the numbers of overseas job scam cases affecting Malaysians, it encourages those with information on such cases to come forward.

“We have not received reports on job scams. However, victims can file a report with the Labour Department, including in Sabah and Sarawak for any job scams issues so that we can act accordingly,” it said.

MCA Public Services and Complaints Department head Datuk Seri Michael Chong said many of the job scam victims he encountered were enticed to work in African or Middle Eastern countries.
“Many of these countries are war-torn and so these ‘employment agents’ would tell the victims there is a lot of construction work to rebuild the country.

“These victims are mostly semi-skilled or unskilled workers who are attracted to the salaries which are supposedly from RM6,000 to RM10,000 a month,” he said.

However, he said, these victims were then cheated out of their salaries and left with little to no protection in a foreign country.

To stop these scams from occurring, he urged those interested to find work to carry out background checks on the company.

“You must make sure that there is an incorporated company so if anything happened to you, there is a company we could look for,” he said.

He also advised people to be wary if the salary offered is too good to be true, or if the job interview doesn't take place in the company’s office.

“There are some ‘interviews’ which are even being conducted in coffeeshops,” said Chong.

He said he noticed more of such cases in recent years, especially as many Malaysians want to go overseas to eke out a livelihood.

Last December, 47 Malaysians were detained in Cambodia for being involved in illegal online gambling activities.

It was reported that they were offered jobs with lucrative salaries but had only found out that it was a scam when they arrived in Cambodia.

In February, eight Sarawakians were stranded in Liberia after allegedly being cheated by an employment syndicate.

The Malaysian Employers Federation called for a dedicated government agency to help protect the welfare of Malaysians who go overseas to work.

Its executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said this was to prevent them from being exploited and falling prey to illegal job syndicates.

“We have more than one million Malaysians working overseas but we have no proper body to monitor their affairs,” he said yesterday.

He noted that the Filippine government would ensure that their citizens who are sent overseas to work are properly trained and that they are employed by a legitimate company.

“The Filipino government would ensure that there is a proper document signed between the employer and agent, and if anything happens to the worker, the agent will be held responsible.

“We should emulate the Philippines to help our workers who aspire to work overseas,” he said.
However, he said the grim reality was that many Malaysian workers were enticed to work overseas because of the attractive pay, even if the details surrounding the employment were unclear.

“Employees are attracted to the higher wages offered in those countries, where the income promised triple or even quadruple what they are earning in Malaysia – and most of these jobs do not require high level of skills such as picking fruit.

“A difficult economic situation in Malaysia with the rising costs of living also contribute to the problem.

“We must re-look at our employment practices, how we remunerate our employees and develop our talent,” he said.

Malaysian Trades Union Congress secretary-general J. Solomon agreed that better policies and enforcement were needed to monitor the outflow of Malaysian workers to other countries.

“The authorities and their relevant agencies need to know where Malaysian workers are going when they travel overseas,” he said.

He said tighter enforcement was especially needed as more false job advertisements were disseminated easily on various social media platforms.

“It is high time the Cabinet review and encourage companies to comply with minimum wage level,” he said.

The low wages in Malaysia and the stigma of 3D (dirty, dangerous and difficult) jobs cause Malaysians to desperately seek employment outside the country, he added.

“These factors are causing Malaysians to go elsewhere to find alternative sources of income,” he said.