‘Rethink crackdown on workers’

MEF: Shortage of foreign labour will be bad for our economy

By ASHLEY TANG and STEPHANIE LEE
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Key sectors such as construction and plantation are expected to face a shortage of labour following the cessation of the foreign workers rehiring programme, said the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF).

Its executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said delays and late delivery of projects could happen, adding that penalties would also be imposed on late projects.

“If the crackdown happens, I don’t think the foreign workers will dare to come out openly and continue their work. They will of course go into hiding and this will affect the (construction) projects,” he said.

Additionally, he said the plantation sector, especially in Sabah, would also be affected.

“The very nature of plantation is that if you don’t harvest the fruits, then they will rot and go to waste.

“You know that the implication can be very serious as losses can run into billions of ringgit,” he said.

Shamsuddin said he understood the Government’s decision to come down hard on illegal foreign workers but hoped that the hiring of legal foreign workers need to be made available.

“I think this is critical in the transition period. While you enforce the law very strictly, you also need to look into the needs urgently so the economy will not suffer,” he said.

Bangladeshi English daily, The Daily Star, reported that thousands of Bangladeshis were living anxiously as they faced the risks of arrest and deportation.

It also reported that work permits of migrant workers who were employed for more than 10 years were being cancelled by the Government.

The report said the rehiring programme was not fair as workers could not deal directly with the Immigration Department. It said those who contacted the department were referred to agents.

The report said Bangladeshis then had to deal with sub-agents of the agents and had to pay more than RM5,000 to be legal workers and some ended up being cheated.

Human rights non-governmental organisation Tenaganita director Aegile Fernandez called for the Government to stop the raids on the migrants.

“Do the raids on officials, agents and employers. Haul them up to the courts first,” she said when asked to comment.

Immigration Department director-general Datuk Seri Mustafar Ali had set yesterday as the deadline for the rehiring and relocation programme.

From today, the department will carry out Ops Mega 3.0 to flush out illegal immigrants nationwide.

In Kota Kinabalu, Parti Warisan Sabah secretary-general Lorento Padua defended the proposal to issue special passes to illegal foreign workers in the state.

He said he proposal by Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal did not equate to automatic citizenship for them but it was rather to better monitor the illegal immigrants and at the same time spur economic growth in Sabah.

The issuance of special passes to foreign workers is not something new in Sabah as former chief minister Tan Sri Chong Kah Kiat implemented a similar move during his tenure between 2001 and 2003.