

## Manpower shortage hindering recovery efforts, says MEF

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**PETALING JAYA:** The shortage of manpower in sectors shunned by locals is hindering recovery although the government has opened up the economy.

Saying this, Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) President Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman expressed concern on manpower shortage especially for critical sectors other than the plantation, construction, manufacturing sectors – such as the food sector and large retailers.

"MEF supports the opening up the economy and employers are eager to recover their businesses, but those in these sectors are frustrated at the scarcity of available workers," he said in a statement today.

"Despite the higher unemployment rate especially among the youths, employers in these sectors are faced with extreme difficulties to get the required manpower to run their business.

Citing the food business as an example, Syed Hussain said many eateries continue to only offer takeaway for even though they are allowed to offer dining-in.

"The eateries are suffering because they are not able to get the workers to do the necessary work," he added.

He said the government must recognise that not all businesses could be performed digitally as most of these sectors still depend on manual labour.

"We support efforts to reduce dependence on foreign workers in certain sectors, but the government should address this complex matter on sectoral basis as many sectors also depend of foreign labour apart from the plantation and construction sectors.

"We acknowledge that the government may be facing complexities in working out the G-to-G arrangements to source for foreign workers, however the fact remains that the economy cannot improve if all the elements to run it are not in place.

"Malaysia cannot perform at optimum level if we only hope to depend on domestic workers, and if this situation continues, other issues will arise.

"We hope for greater focus and effort by the government to resolve this matter.

"There has to be a balance between doing business and the supply of foreign workers," Syed Hussain said.

MEF proposes that rather than impose a blanket rule to disallow foreign workers, the government considers allowing foreign workers in terms of sector by sector, beginning with the eateries.