

Manpower shortage hitting sectors reliant on manual labour: MEF

Not all businesses can shift to digital processes, says president

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KUALA LUMPUR – Although the government's decision to reopen the economy has provided employers with motivation to see an upswing, a manpower shortage in sectors shunned by locals is hindering such recovery efforts, the Malaysian Employers Federation warned today.

Its president, Datuk Syed Hussain Syed Husman, expressed serious concern on the issue of the lack of manpower, especially for critical sectors other than plantation, construction and manufacturing, such as the food sector and among large retailers.

“MEF supports the opening up of 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.

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

“Industries in these sectors continue to suffer due to a manpower shortage,” he said in a statement today.

Citing the food industry as an example, he said although the firms are allowed to operate, most eateries continue to only offer take-away due to the lack of staff.

“The eateries are suffering because they are not able to get the

workers to do the necessary work," he said.

Syed Hussain said the government must recognise that not all businesses can be performed digitally as most 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 a sectoral basis as many sectors depend on foreign labour, apart from the plantation and construction sectors."

Acknowledging that there are complexities between nations in arrangements to source for foreign workers, he stressed that the economy cannot improve if all the elements to run it are not in place.

"We propose that, rather than impose a blanket rule to disallow foreign workers, the government should consider allowing foreign workers in terms of sector by sector, and perhaps should begin with eateries," he said.

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

"There has to be a balance between doing business and the supply of foreign workers." – The Vibes, September 21, 2021