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Statement

Malaysia & migrant workforce: legalize present undocumented workers rather than import 1.5 million new Bangladeshi workers

Friday 2 October 2015, by [PSM \(Malaysia\)](#), [RASIAH Rani](#) (Date first published: 9 September 2015).

PSM Statement - Abandon the plan for 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers

9 September 2015

Malaysia's order for 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers is a highly controversial issue on more than one count.

Does Malaysia really need a fresh injection of manpower when there is so much available or idle in the country? But the UNHCR proposal to fill the 1.5 million job vacancies with the 100,000 or so refugees awaiting resettlement was shot down with the excuse that such a move would attract more refugees to Malaysia.

Civil society groups have pushed for another option - for the almost 3 million undocumented workers already in the country, to be legalized and retained. This suggestion makes sense, as these workers are already here and working, and familiarized with the country. The cost outlay for the government too would be marginal compared to bringing in a fresh batch of workers. However this suggestion too has been dismissed without sound reason. The Home Minister announced that all undocumented workers would be repatriated before the 1.5 million are brought in. The cost implications of this are massive, and going by past attempts, there is little guarantee of success.

Apart from this, what is the government's commitment to its 11th Malaysia Plan objective of reducing Malaysia's dependence on migrant labour? Currently migrant workers comprise about 30% of our workforce, and the Plan intends to cut that by half in the next five years. Bringing in more migrant workers clearly contradicts with the Plan.

If the government is serious about reducing dependence on migrant labour, it must first stop its ridiculous claim that Malaysian workers are not prepared to do 'Dirty, Dangerous and Difficult' jobs. A virtual colony of unskilled Malaysian workers who are settled in southern Johor, do just those jobs across the causeway only because they can earn more.

The government must admit that its foreign investment-based economic model would flop if not for a poorly paid workforce. It has to be prepared to adopt radical and responsible policies such as compensating low wages with subsidized housing, school transport etc, in order that lowly-paid workers and their families can lead decent lives in the face of the ever rising cost of living. Malaysian workers will then be persuaded to stay home and take up 3D jobs.

The government must also find ways to bring into the productive labour force the large number of underemployed Malaysians doing poverty perpetuating 'kerja kampung' in the countryside. It also

needs to address increasing youth unemployment that is acknowledged in the 11th Malaysia Plan. The lofty objectives of the 11th Malaysia Plan need sincerity, resolve and commitment to materialize.

Unfortunately Malaysia's policies and decisions on labour and outsourcing are heavily influenced by unsavoury considerations which do not benefit the rakyat or the country. The chief consideration is that millions can be made out of moving poor desperate humans from their home countries to the receiving country. And in this regard, the web of collusion between the governments and private contractors of both Malaysia and Bangladesh is shocking.

The two existing migrant management contractors in Malaysia separately earn an average of a hundred million each year from the issuing of the PLKS, the work permit originating from the Immigration Department. The 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers are each expected to pay the contractor RM3,000 for air fare and other services. Even if there is a RM50 commission to be made out of each worker, a whopping RM75 million can be pocketed at the initial phase of the contract.

Even more scandalous is the unabashed complicity of top politicians in decisions concerning this lucrative business. There seems to be a kind of seamless connection between the home ministry and the contracting companies. A kind of retirement gratuity plan seems to be in place as evident in the case of former home minister Azmi Khalid whose now suspended company, Bestinet, had a contract for recording and monitoring migrants. And he is not the only one.

Now the strongest contender for the latest contract involving the 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers is Real Time Networking, a company set up this year by Datuk Abdul Hakim Hamidi, the younger brother of Zahid Hamidi, the Home Minister and newly minted Deputy Prime Minister. Zahid Hamidi heads the ministry that approves the request for migrant workers, and the contract for migrant management. His brother stands to earn millions if he wins the contract, but Zahid Hamidi appears to see no clash of interest, or departure from the principle of accountability in this arrangement. There are also no SOPs to resign from ministerial positions or precedents to deter the Home Minister.

So Real Time looks poised to win this multi-million ringgit contract doing a job that the Immigration Department under the Home Ministry is better placed to do with all its expertise and experience.

On the Bangladeshi front, Real Time has offered a directorship to a representative of BAIRA (Bangladesh Association of International Recruitment Agencies), one of the largest trade bodies in Bangladesh with 1000 government approved recruitment agencies as members. Not unexpectedly, BAIRA has fully endorsed Real Time and recommended it in glowing terms ('great and wonderful system') to the Bangladesh government. For the Bangladeshi government this scheme is a welcome opportunity to earn bigger remittances through selling the labour of its workers cheaply in a foreign land. The plight of hundreds of thousands of its workers, leaving behind their families, and working under highly exploitative conditions seems to matter little in comparison.

The only way out of this controversial venture is for the government to abandon it. It should instead issue work permits to the more than 2 million undocumented workers already working here. After all, many of them began as documented workers who along the way fell prey to unscrupulous agents and oppressive employers. Also the job of legalizing undocumented workers should be handled by the Immigration Department itself and not outsourced to private companies so that there is no repeat of the 6P fiasco. This line of action will constructively address the problem of undocumented workers in the country and save the government much money besides doing wonders for its credibility.

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P.S.

* <http://partisosialis.org/en/node/3361>