

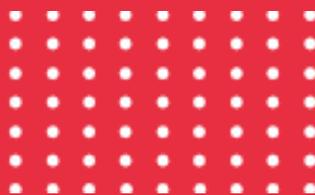


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Axing the agents

Malaysians will soon be able to hire foreign workers directly as part of G2G efforts by the Human Resources Ministry to eliminate middlemen from the recruitment process via an AI platform. > See reports on page 3 by **TARRENCE TAN** and **QISTINA SALLEHUDDIN**

The Star
EXCLUSIVE

Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri R. Ramanan

Direct hiring system in the works

HR Ministry's platform aims to cut out middlemen, protect foreign workers

By **TARRENCE TAN**
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PETALING JAYA: The Human Resources Ministry is in the process of formulating a pathway that would allow Malaysian employers to directly hire foreign workers, as part of efforts to eliminate third-party agents or middlemen from the recruitment process, said Minister Datuk Seri R. Ramanan.

He said the proposed hiring platform, which is being fine-tuned, will be discussed with the Home Ministry and relevant stakeholders, before being presented to Cabinet for approval.

He said the involvement of third-party agents in foreign labour recruitment has been a persistent issue in Malaysia, frequently raised by MPs and highlighted in news reports, as it exposes workers to exploitation, including debt bondage and elements of modern slavery.

The proposed platform, he said, would allow employers to communicate directly with the foreign workers.

"Currently, employers have to speak to the agents first.

"The issue is that we don't know whether the worker truly agrees to the terms of employment.



Closing gaps: The Human Resources Ministry says its proposed hiring platform will reduce instances of exploitation. — YAP CHEE HONG/The Star

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EXCLUSIVE

"That is why many foreign workers say that they were promised 'job A' but were instead given 'job B' upon arriving here," he said in an exclusive interview with *The Star*.

Ramanan said the proposed platform, which is expected to be ready later this year, aims to protect foreign workers from being

charged exorbitant "agent fees" that can amount to tens of thousands of ringgit.

"Today, some workers reportedly pay fees ranging from US\$5,000 (RM19,630) to as much as US\$8,000 (RM31,408) before they even set foot in this country.

"This contributes to social problems, human trafficking and money laundering," he said, adding that the International Labour Organisation upholds a principle that recruitment fees should not exceed one month's wages for foreign and domestic workers.

According to published reports,

the cost to hire workers from Bangladesh typically involved a cost of between RM16,000 to RM25,000 to secure a job in Malaysia, while Nepalis are forced to pay up to RM10,000 to work as security guards here.

Acknowledging that the proposed platform may not eliminate long-standing issues entirely, Ramanan said at the very least, it would address the middlemen problem and help reduce unnecessary migration costs in hiring foreign workers.

"The platform will match employers with suitable foreign workers based on their requirements.

"When an employer identifies a suitable worker, they can simply click, arrange a time and conduct a virtual interview," he said.

To address language barriers, artificial intelligence (AI) will be integrated into the platform to provide real-time translation during interviews.

"A worker in Nepal may not be fluent in Bahasa Malaysia (BM), so AI will translate the conversation.

"Employers can speak in BM, and it will be translated to the worker's mother tongue.

The platform, he said, is still in its infancy as ongoing discussions

are being held with labour-source countries to ensure alignment with their respective laws and regulations.

"Sustainability is also a key consideration, as we anticipate high traffic on the platform.

"We will provide periodic updates and table the proposal to the Cabinet for approval," he said, adding that the initiative is part of a broader effort to position Malaysia as an Asean ethical recruitment hub by 2028 and to improve the country's standing within Tier 1 of the United States Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report.

It is understood that the proposed platform will adopt a government-to-government approach, with no involvement of third parties in the recruitment process.

MyDigital ID is also expected to play a crucial part in ensuring the platform's success as it will include worker identification, salary crediting and other administrative functions.

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