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National Economic Action Council tasked with reducing foreign labour, says Rafizi



KUALA LUMPUR: The government is committed to reducing the number of foreign workers in the country so that more jobs will be available to Malaysians, says Rafizi Ramli.

The Economy Minister said the National Economic Action Council (NEAC) has been tasked with finding a specific mechanism to reduce foreign workers in Malaysia periodically, adding that the discussion will begin in April.

On top of that, he said the government will also include the matter in the 13th Malaysia Plan (13MP) that will be tabled next year so that the number of foreign workers can be significantly reduced.

“This (effort) requires not only policies but also cooperation from the industry because before, when previous administrations wanted to reduce foreign workers, the suggestions were met with objection.

“If we continue to have between 3 million and 3.5 million documented or undocumented foreign workers, this will create a group that will offer a lower cost structure.

“This will definitely affect our local traders because they can’t compete with such low prices and as a result, consumers will prefer to buy products or services from them (foreign traders),” he told the Dewan Rakyat on Monday (March 11).

Rafizi was responding to a supplementary question by Datuk Shahar Abdullah (BN-Paya Besar) who asked for the government’s plan on reducing foreign workers in Malaysia.

Shahar, who is former deputy finance minister, said the “dominance of Ali Bangla” in Malaysia, referring to the foreign workers who are mostly from Bangladesh, is causing unnecessary competition among the locals.

While the presence of the foreign workers is concerning, Rafizi pointed out that certain issues affecting the locals were caused by Malaysians themselves.

For instance, he said there have been many business owners who would rent out their premises to the foreign nationals instead of hiring them as workers.

“This is because we have a phenomena where they (local traders) prefer to get between RM3,000 and RM4,000 a month from the foreigners by allowing them to use their name and premises.

“This has yet to be resolved and currently, we have no specific law to take action against the locals who are allowing this phenomena to continue to happen.

“For us, aside from improving the economic structure and reducing the number of foreign workers, we must also tighten the law so that it will be illegal for the locals to rent out their premises to the foreign nationals,” Rafizi added.

In response to an earlier question by Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin (PN-Larut) who asked about steps to empower bumiputra businesses, Rafizi said the government is planning on expanding the roles of GLCs and GLICs.

“The government is also examining and improving the new agenda of bumiputra empowerment.

“The recent Bumiputera Economic Congress 2024 (KEB 2024) from Feb 29 to March 2, was a platform to obtain input and views to improve the bumiputra empowerment agenda so that it is more comprehensive towards achieving a more just, equitable and inclusive society.”