

### Rebranding needed for the 3D jobs

PETALING JAYA: Despite the unemployment situation due to the Covid-19 pandemic, locals have not taken up dangerous, dirty and difficult (3D) jobs.

Industry players believe that a rebranding exercise of these jobs might help attract locals although higher salaries and better working hours are also needed.

3D jobs currently performed by foreign workers, Malaysian Employers Federation president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman said, are being shunned by locals due to the perception that these jobs are demeaning and socially unacceptable.

He believes that the rebranding of these jobs may make them more attractive to locals and at the same time, reduce the dependency on foreign workers.

For example, he said a rubbish collector can be rebranded as “hygiene associate”, a gardener can be called a “landscape associate”, and a bus driver as well as a security guard can be known as a “bus captain” and an “auxiliary police”, he said when contacted.

According to the **Department of Statistics Malaysia**, the national unemployment rate rose to 4.6% in 2021 from 4.5% in 2020, the highest unemployment rate since 1993.

The manpower shortage in 3D jobs had also been exacerbated by the exodus of foreign workers during the pandemic – when work permits expired or were not renewed.

Prior to the pandemic, Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri M. Saravanan said there were 1.7 million foreign workers in the country but currently only 1.17 million were left.

As such, Syed Hussain said it is paramount that these jobs are transformed to look and feel more dignified by rebranding, upgrading of skills through TVET and by creating a grade for these jobs.

“Salaries and benefits then must be in line with the grade levels,” he said, adding that opportunities through education either through skills or formal education must be made available to students and employees where the micro-crediting of these job grades must be established.

He said the rebranding of jobs should also be supported by the introduction of higher mechanisation and better technology.

“The industry should be provided with the necessary support and incentives for automation and mechanisation. The government should provide automation incentives to ensure SMEs, especially micro enterprises, are given assistance to mechanise, automate, digitalise and adopt new technology in their operations,” he said.

He added that education and mindset change of the community are also needed.

“They must see these jobs as essential or vital to society,” he said.

On whether wages should increase to make them appealing for locals, he said it should be linked to an individual's skill level.

"Currently, employees are not keen to seek skill certification as such certification is not linked to the wages and those at the lower end of the spectrum are generally paid the minimum wage. Differentiation in wages between local workers and foreign workers should be based on certified skills. With certified skills and higher wages, locals would be attracted to perform the rebranded 3D jobs," he said.

"While stigma towards these jobs would be removed through rebranding exercises, they must also be supplemented with clear career progression plans."

Syed Hussain pointed out that this scenario is common in developed countries, such as the United Kingdom and Japan, where locals take pride in performing such jobs.

SME Association of Malaysia national secretary general CS Chin said rebranding jobs may attract locals to apply for them but pointed out that salaries and working hours would ultimately be more important for them.

"3D jobs have long working hours and this is where locals feel they have been shortchanged. They would prefer to take up other jobs," he said.

"It is difficult to remove the stigma of such jobs because there are ample other jobs locals can do."

He stressed that shorter working hours and a higher salary would instead attract locals to these jobs.

Malaysian Youth Council president Mohd Izzat Afifi Abdul Hamid said rebranding such jobs should not be a priority.

Instead, he said it should be the "pay and benefit package".

Mohd Izzat cited the situation in which Malaysians would rather work in the blue-collar industry in Singapore where the hours are long and the work is tough but the pay can reach up to five times the salary they would receive in Malaysia.

He noted that a name change may be effective only at the early stage but later, those who were employed may resign if the remuneration is not ideal.

"As we know, the cost of living is increasing and it will keep increasing. If the pay remains stagnant for most, it's an issue for the young people. Employers must consider raising their salaries and overall package to keep attracting young locals to work with them," he said.

Mohd Izzat said youths have higher expectations about what they want from a job as they are always being told to be ambitious.

But when faced with a labour market where the jobs are not good, he said, youths feel dissatisfied.

"In recent years, low-skilled jobs have become relatively less well paid, and often more demanding. Given this backdrop, we should not be surprised that people – especially young men – no longer want to do basic jobs. Jobs that are neither well paid, nor a source of creativity, are no longer held in high esteem by the wider culture," he said.

To change the perception of youths, Mohd Izzat suggests that employers start off by offering a good pay and benefit package, and promote a career path.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2022/05/06/rebranding-needed-for-the-3d-jobs>