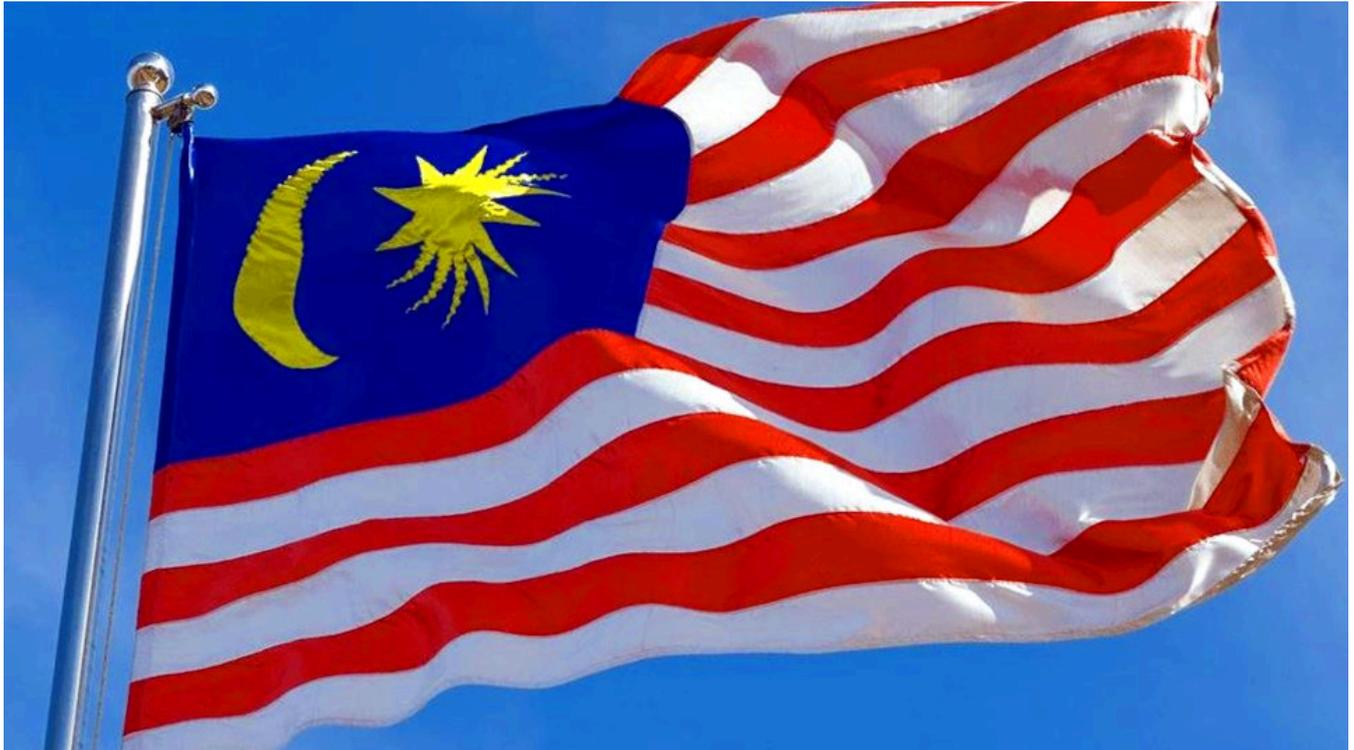


## Malaysia moves toward direct hiring of foreign workers to cut middlemen

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**Dhaka: Malaysia is working on a new system that would allow employers to directly hire foreign workers, aiming to eliminate third-party agents and reduce exploitation in the recruitment process, Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri R. Ramanan has said.**

The proposed pathway, now being fine-tuned, will be discussed with the Home Ministry and other stakeholders before being submitted to the Cabinet for approval. The system is expected to be ready later this year, local media The Star reports on February 4.

Ramanan said the heavy involvement of recruitment agents has long been a concern, frequently raised by lawmakers and highlighted in media reports, as it exposes migrant workers to exploitation, debt bondage, and elements of modern slavery.

Under the proposed system, employers would be able to communicate directly with prospective foreign workers, removing agents from the initial hiring stage. “At present, employers must go through agents first, and we often do not know whether the worker genuinely agrees to the employment terms,” he said, noting that many migrants are promised one job but assigned another upon arrival.

The initiative is designed to curb excessive recruitment fees, which can range from US\$5,000 to US\$8,000, paid by workers before entering Malaysia. Such costs, he said, contribute to human trafficking, money laundering, and other social problems. The International Labour Organisation recommends that recruitment fees should not exceed one month’s wages.

Published reports indicate that Bangladeshi workers often pay between RM16,000 and RM25,000 to secure jobs in Malaysia, while Nepali workers may pay up to RM10,000 to work as security guards.

The digital platform will match employers with suitable workers based on job requirements and allow virtual interviews. Artificial intelligence will be integrated to provide real-time translation, helping overcome language barriers between employers and workers.

While acknowledging the system may not resolve all long-standing issues, Ramanan said it would significantly reduce the role of middlemen and lower migration costs. The initiative is expected to follow a government-to-government model, with MyDigital ID playing a key role in worker identification, salary payments, and administration.

The move is part of Malaysia’s broader goal to become an ASEAN ethical recruitment hub by 2028 and to strengthen its standing in the US Trafficking in Persons Report.

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