

## Concern over higher levy on foreign workers

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PETALING JAYA: Various organisations are against the Government's move to increase the levy on foreign workers, arguing that the extra costs will only be passed on to consumers.

Real Estate and Housing Developers Association president Datuk Ng Seing Liong said it was not the right time to increase the levy as developers were in the midst of adopting the Industrial Building System (IBS).

“It's definitely going to be a huge increase in costs for property buyers. It is counter-productive. We are implementing the IBS to eventually reduce dependence on foreign labour, which shows that we are working with the Government,” he said.

The IBS is a system in which construction materials and parts are pre-fabricated in factories and not on-site by labourers, which was the usual practice.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who chairs the Cabinet Committee on Foreign and Illegal Workers, had announced on Thursday that the levy for foreign workers would be increased next year.

Amnesty would also be granted to illegal foreign workers to return to their own countries without facing action.

Malaysian Foreign Maids Agencies Association president Alwi Bavutty said the levy for the industry should not be raised from the present RM360 yearly.

“Employers now have to pay RM550 or more for monthly salaries and this will add to their burden,” he said, adding that many Malaysians had no choice but to hire maids.

Malaysian Indian Contractors Association president R. Muthiah said the move would increase the cost of bringing in foreign workers through Construction Labour Exchange Centre Bhd, a government-appointed agency.

However, he said the association accepted that any levy increase would need to be tolerated by the industry.

In Johor Baru, Malaysian Indian Business Association president K. Sivakumar said the Government should not make such decisions without a contingency plan.

“If such decisions are rushed, the country's economy will be affected because many industries depend on foreign workers,” he said, describing any such move as “untimely”.

“Most locals are not up to doing hard labour or do not possess the skills to perform the jobs that foreign workers do,” he said, adding that there should be more night schools to train local workers in various skills.

- The Star