

RM15k price cap plus extras

Some maid agencies tagging 'hidden costs' to cover losses

By MARTIN CARVALHO
mart3@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Those seeking to hire Indonesian domestic helpers may end up paying extra "hidden costs" on top of the RM15,000 price cap, according to employment consultants.

National Human Resources Association Malaysia (Pusma) president Zarina Ismail said that although the price cap imposed by the government is reasonable, some agencies may be charging extra for additional services they have to bear.

"Agencies are responsible for the maids they bring in and this responsibility lasts for the entire contract period or until the maid is sent back.

"As such, the agencies will be on call 24/7 for employers with some even calling to complain at 1am," she said when contacted yesterday.

She also noted the extra charges may also be due to the risks which

some agencies are taking following the recent memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Malaysia and Indonesia for the sourcing of domestic helpers.

"The situation is still unclear as the One Channel System (OCS) is not fully operational yet.

"Some agencies are taking a wait-and-see attitude and are not keen in sourcing Indonesian domestic helpers at the moment," she said.

She said Indonesian maids who are already in the country and who want to renew their contracts must now get an endorsement from an employment agency.

"There is a risk for the agency endorsing such maids as some may lack proper details under the previous contracts," she added.

However, she said agencies that are charging above the cap prices risk action being taken against them by the authorities.

Owing to the uncertainty, she said that interest in domestic helpers from the Philippines has increased

in recent months.

She said there were about 500 applications for Filipino maids last month compared to the usual 100 to 200 applications in previous months.

She added that employers are willing to pay between RM15,000 and RM17,500 to hire Filipino maids who are considered more reliable.

It was recently highlighted by *The Star* that some agencies were charging between RM17,695.08 and RM23,300 for maids.

This comes after the price for hiring Indonesian domestic helpers was capped at RM15,000 following the recent MOU between Malaysia and Indonesia.

Julian Tan, a consulting director of an employment agency, acknowledged that some agencies may be charging above the cap price for Indonesian maids.

"Some feel that the profit margin is too low and charge extra for the risks and effort involved in obtaining an Indonesian maid," he said.

He said that RM17,500 would be a more reasonable sum for agencies to charge employers seeking to hire Indonesian maids.

Tan said he has stopped dealing with Indonesian domestic helpers and has shifted focus to those from the Philippines.

Association of Employment Agencies Malaysia vice-president Suresh Tan said domestic workers from both Indonesia and Philippines both have their own unique skill sets, which appeal to employers.

"Both are very capable of carrying out household chores and other duties.

"Language-wise, Malaysians may prefer those from the Philippines as they are able to speak English, whereas Indonesians are exceptionally good at cleaning.

"Filipinas are meanwhile better skilled at caring for children and the elderly due to their culture while Indonesians' cooking skills may be better suited for the Malaysian palate," he said.

Some desperate enough to pay premium for maids

By GERARD GIMINO
gerard.gimino@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: A whopping RM28,000 is the fee a senior manager had to pay to secure a maid from Indonesia.

Another Malaysian paid close to RM20,000 to a maid agency.

However, the hefty cost is no deterrent for some employers who are desperate to acquire maids to not only perform household chores but to care for the elderly and sick.

These are some of the employers *The Star* interviewed after it was recently highlighted that some agencies were charging between RM17,695.08 and RM23,300 for a maid despite the price for hiring Indonesian domestic helpers has been capped at RM15,000 following an MOU between Malaysia and Indonesia.

The senior manager, who declined to be named, said despite the hefty fee of RM28,000, he was willing to fork out the money as a

domestic worker was urgently needed to care for his bedridden mother at home.

The fee also included three months' salary for the maid, he said.

"As we sourced from our regular agent, no deposits were needed. We only had to make the full upfront payment once the helper arrived in June," he said.

He added that he began sourcing for a helper from early April as his previous maid's contract was slated to end in June.

"We are also fortunate to have not gone without a maid during this period," he said.

The cost, however, is too high for some, who have opted for cleaning services provided by agencies.

General manager W. Thomas, 30, said his family had to wait for one year before finally securing an Indonesian maid in June.

"We paid close to RM20,000 to the agency as we really needed a maid, given that we are always out and

about for work, leaving only our grandmother at home.

"Our helper also plays the dual role of looking after the home and caring for our grandmother," he said, adding that the maid hired was a big help.

Food and beverage entrepreneur Nicholas Tham, 40, opted for cleaning services instead of getting a full-time maid due to various reasons.

"We did consider getting a maid but after hearing stories of how some maids had run away after two to three months, we prefer less risky measures.

"It is more affordable to hire cleaning services where these workers come over and clean homes for a certain fee," he said, adding that the workers would come to his house monthly.

The cleaning service company charged RM150 for four hours, Tham said.

Tenaganita executive director Glorene Das lamented that domestic workers remained unrecognised

for their work.

"They go to foreign lands to work and often take care of the needs of the families in spite of the loneliness they face," she said.

She added that domestic workers were also human beings and they had dignity, rights and needs.

"It is our hope that the Malaysian government will take the effort to protect them through a separate legislation and regulatory mechanism."

Indonesian Ambassador Hermono told *The Star* that any agencies charging more than RM15,000 for an Indonesian domestic worker would be in violation of the MOU signed between Indonesia and Malaysia.

"The price cap is RM15,000. If any employer has paid more than this, they can report it to the Indonesian embassy or even to the Human Resources Ministry.

"The agency will then be black-listed from further acquiring Indonesian domestic workers," he said.