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Fastlane approval for skilled expats to come into force

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PUTRAJAYA: There will be no more three-month wait for companies hiring highly-skilled professional expatriates beginning June 15, says Economy Minister Rafizi Ramli (pic).

This comes following the implementation a "single window approach" that will see the application and approval process slashed from about 80 days to about 22 days.

"The single window approach will be implemented in two weeks' time and will be carried out in stages," he said after chairing the Special Task Force to Facilitate Business (Pemudah) meeting here yesterday.

The system, to be known as the

"Xpats Gateway", would be managed by TalentCorp Malaysia, said Rafizi, adding that agencies such as the Immigration Department, which is currently using its own system, would gradually be integrated into the new system.

"There are about 11 separate agencies handling applications for visa for professionals. This was one of the grouses raised by industries," he said.

Rafizi said currently, the application and approval process to hire professional expatriates could take up to 80 days depending on the sectors involved.

He said under the new system,



visa application and approval would be shortened to five days from the current 30 days, while the requirement for companies to advertise job vacancies for locals would be cut from 30 days to 14.

The companies will be allowed to apply for foreign professionals if the posts advertised are not taken up in that time.

Rafizi said the second phase of the single window approach would be expanded to cover visa applications and approvals managed by both Malaysia Digital Economy Corp (MDEC) and the Iskandar Regional Development Authority (Irda).

Both agencies, he said, would migrate from their current system to the new single window system by Aug 15.

He said at present, there were about 5,000 visa applications for professionals each month by the digital sector alone.

Rafizi also announced a pilot project to be introduced in about a month's time involving contracts awarded to cleaning companies.

He said the new system would do away with the current "headcount" approach, which had resulted in the over-dependence on foreign workers, and would instead focus on the performance of the company seeking to secure a cleaning contract.

On another matter, Rafizi said the recent depreciation of the

Malaysian ringgit against the US dollar could be traced back six months to the uncertainties in the United States beginning in February.

He said prior to this, the ringgit had strengthened against the US dollar in December up to February.

"However, the United States was hit by consecutive uncertainties since February, driving up demand for the dollar," he said, citing the US Federal Reserve interest rate, the Silicon Valley Bank crisis and the ongoing US debt ceiling standoff as among the factors.

Rafizi said Malaysia's economic fundamentals remained strong, expressing cautious optimism that the situation would stabilise in the coming months.