

# Group plans to start maid training centre in Myanmar

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Non-profit body aims to send S'pore trainers to teach women there skills like cooking



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A Singapore non-profit organisation is in talks with the Myanmar government to set up a skills training centre in Myanmar for women who wish to be employed as domestic workers in Singapore.

The Foreign Domestic Worker Association for Social Support and Training (Fast) plans to send trainers from Singapore to the centre to help Myanmar women acquire vocational skills such as cooking before they leave their home country, said its president, Mr Seah Seng Choon.

This comes after the Myanmar government announced on April 26 that it was lifting a ban in place since 2014 that prevents its women from working as maids in Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong and Macau.

Despite the ban, many Myanmar women continued to go overseas to work as domestic helpers, said Mr Seah.

According to Fast's estimates, Myanmar women make up 50,000, or about one-fifth, of the 250,000 maids here. They are the third-largest group, behind Indonesians, who number about 125,000, and Filipinos, about 70,000.

Mr Seah said: "The lifting of the ban is a welcome move that will allow the women to work here with more peace of mind. It will also allow us to work more collaboratively with the Myanmar government to offer their citizens assistance and protect their well-being."

He added that similar training centres are planned for Indonesia and the Philippines.

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MR SEAH SENG CHOON, president of the Foreign Domestic Worker Association for Social Support and Training, on Myanmar's government lifting a ban on its women working as maids in Singapore.

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Some domestic helpers from Myanmar who spoke to The Straits Times said they did not know there was a ban in place when they came here to work.

A 24-year-old woman, who declined to be named, said her agency did not tell her about the ban when she came to Singapore four months ago. Two months after she started working, she said, her employer threatened to withhold her allowance of \$50 a month after she broke a mop by accident.

Her agency had imposed a recruitment fee of six months' salary, so she was not receiving any other income at the time.

"I said sorry but ma'am did not accept it. She twisted my wrists and jabbed me with a sharp pencil," she said through an interpreter, revealing a small circular scar on her chest.

She then ran away and has been staying at a shelter for abused maids for the last two months. While at the shelter, she learnt about the ban and decided not to report the incident to her embassy out of fear that her case would be delayed further.

"I did not know if I would be sent back to Myanmar. I just wanted to find a new employer quickly," she said.

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Ms Tin Thandar Phyo, who has been working here for two years, said her agency in Yangon also did not inform her of the ban.

"I found out after one year when my friend, who is also from Myanmar, told me," said the 28-year-old through an interpreter.



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"Even though I had a good experience with my employer, I stopped recommending to my friends to come here to work because I was worried it could be unsafe to work illegally."

Now that the ban has been lifted, she hopes there can be more regulation of recruitment agencies and better protection from exploitation.

"Some agencies will charge six or seven months' salary, others even 10 months' salary. I feel it is very unfair to us," she said.

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