

Industry faces manpower crunch, especially in dorms

Jaded by the increasing hours on the job and the heavy workload, many security officers working in dormitories quit last year as the number of Covid-19 cases among foreign workers rose steadily.

While cases of abuse of security officers have increased during the pandemic, manpower is also a concern.

Mr Deva Joseph, head of operations at Premier Security Co-operative, said that around 70 per cent of officers who worked at dormitories have left the agency.

He told *The Straits Times*: “There’s a manpower crunch in the security industry now, especially those posted to dorms and medical facilities. And when there is a crunch, the man on the job does more work.”

The latest review of wages for private security officers proposed by the Security Tripartite Cluster (STC) aimed to address the manpower issue in the industry.

NTUC assistant director-general Zainal Sapari, who chairs the STC, said manpower is strained due to the heavier workload brought about by the



Head of operations at Premier Security Co-operative Deva Joseph said about 70 per cent of officers who worked at dormitories have left the job. TNP FILE PHOTO

pandemic. Service buyers are still relying on “headcount-based contracts”, he added, where men are hired simply based on fulfilling numbers, without assessing how best to tackle security issues at a site.

Reliance Security Services has seen around a quarter of its guards resign so far due to the pandemic, and managing director Mack N. Nambiar said the agency frequently hires freelancers off chat

groups.

Mr Nambiar, 67, suggested opening the door to other nationalities – only locals and Malaysians can be hired currently – adding that they would likely be willing to work in Singapore for less money.

Union of Security Employees executive secretary Steve Tan said that with the help of technology and planning, the pool of some 55,000 qualified security officers here would be sufficient to provide for the 18,000 sites where personnel are deployed.

He said the Company Training Committee initiative offered by the union provides resources and expertise to help agencies and service buyers tackle security needs.

“Too many service buyers have a very backward way of thinking about security, hiring a person to do a job that a machine can do,” said Mr Tan.

For example, many officers in condominiums are assigned to a guardhouse to man the camera network and gantries on the premises, he said.

“It is too expensive for an educated Singaporean to be a watchman when he can do much more. This is ‘dinosaur’ thinking.” – OSMOND CHIA