

Employers withholding workers passports to face action

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KUALA LUMPUR: The government will take action against employers who retain their foreign employees in the country even after their visas have expired, said Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr S. Subramaniam.

Employers should either apply to extend the visas before expiry or send their foreign workers back to their home countries, he said in a statement.

Dr Subramaniam also expressed shock at claims by the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) that more than 150,000 foreign workers employed in restaurants and coffeeshops were not able to return home when their visas expired because their employers were holding on to their passports. Stating that the number of foreign workers involved in this case, as claimed by MTUC, was huge, he added: "I urge the MTUC to furnish the Labour Department with details.

"We will act based on the information given by the MTUC."

The MTUC also proposed that the government grant a special amnesty for this group of foreign workers to return to their countries.

Meanwhile, Home Ministry secretary-general Datuk Mahmood Adam said MTUC's claim will be one of the issues studied by the government on the recruitment of foreign workers and the role of outsourcing companies.

The government set up a laboratory to specifically study this issue and it had its first meeting in March. It is represented by 14 ministries and 11 departments as well as agencies.

"The laboratory committee will table the issue tomorrow," said Mahmood.

NGOs back MTUC claim of migrants being unable to return home

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Trades Union Congress' (MTUC) claim that more than 150,000 foreign workers employed in restaurants and coffeeshops were not able to return home when their visas expired as their employers had held on to their passports, was further backed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) contacted by The Malay Mail.

Amnesty International Malaysia executive director Nora Murat said: "Nowadays, it has become a norm for employers of foreign workers to hold on to their identity cards and passports. This has been going on for a very long time."

When aggrieved foreign workers seek the NGO's help, Nora said such complaints submitted to the Human Resource Ministry and the Home Ministry. Last month, Amnesty International Malaysia submitted the migrant workers report to these ministries after a year-long research on the issue.

"As far as we know, no action has been taken. I think strict action should be taken against employers who hold on to their employees' passports as it is illegal for anyone to hold another person's personal documents."

Nora added that MTUC's proposal to the government to grant special amnesty for this group of foreign workers to return to their countries would not be necessary if action was taken against the employers.

Meanwhile, Tenaganita director Dr Irene Fernandez said employers tend to become arrogant because they feel they can get away unpunished while innocent workers are incarcerated for having expired visas.

"There is something significantly wrong with the system of recruitment, placement and employment."

She called on the relevant authorities to change the institutional framework of the system.

"The Human Resource Ministry should be responsible for the management of migrants and the Immigration Department should only deal with entry and exit matters of the country.

"Employers should also stop holding on to the passports of their workers," she said, adding granting special amnesty to foreign workers is the right thing to do.

- The Malay Mail