

## Amnesty can only be a stop-gap solution

Sunday, 23 May 2010

THERE will soon be another round of amnesty for illegal foreign workers in this country, by which they may be repatriated without being penalised. All sectors apparently agree this is the most realistic option in the circumstances.

Neither incarcerating them at taxpayers' expense nor allowing them to continue working unlawfully is acceptable. But have repeated amnesties now become routine, something to be taken for granted?

Amnesty can only be a stop-gap solution for a situation that requires long-term remedy. No thoroughgoing policy can remain stuck in repetitious rounds of amnesty, which can only encourage more illegals to flood these shores.

If amnesties become de facto permanent policy, it will effectively mean that illegals are welcome to work here and will get a holiday home each time they identify themselves. A genuine solution that is both sensible and workable is badly needed.

Perhaps a brainstorming session of all parties concerned can prove productive. Employers, labour agencies and officials from the home and human resource ministries should sit down to identify the problems, sift through likely solutions and arrive at some conclusions.

Beyond that, Malaysia needs to sketch a human resource development profile for the next five-year period, by which the various industries that require foreign labour can articulate the numbers and skill levels of the workers they seek.

More input from the private sector at more regular intervals can help form more appropriate policy.

At the same time, all parties must remember that there cannot continue to be indefinite rounds of amnesty for people who choose to flout the law.

This applies to employers and employment agencies that knowingly hire or process illegal aliens as much as to the workers themselves.

The various unsavoury aspects of illegal labour cannot be under-estimated. In addition, there is sometimes little to distinguish between this and human trafficking, to which Malaysia is no longer a stranger.

To avoid unnecessary problems arising from health, security and other concerns related to illegal foreign labour, all foreign workers must be properly documented, approved and accounted for.

Part of an appropriate solution must be the just application of legal penalties to all those who continue to ignore the law.

- The Star