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NSC-Workers

MANDATORY JAIL TERM, CANING AND HIGHER FINE PROPOSED

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 18 (Bernama) -- A mandatory jail term, caning and a higher fine are among the stern measures proposed for inclusion in the Immigration Act 1959/63 to stop foreigners from entering Malaysia illegally to seek jobs.

National Security Council (NSC) secretary Datuk Jaafar Ismail said under the proposed amendments, anyone who employed foreigners who entered the country illegally or who brought in foreign workers illegally could be jailed for between six months and five years, caned and fined between RM10,000 and RM30,000.

"The proposed amendments have been submitted to the Attorney-General's Chambers and the government will try to table the amendment bill during the current session of Parliament," he told a news conference at the Prime Minister's Department today.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday chaired a meeting of the council which considered the social problems caused by the presence of foreign workers in the country.

Speaking to reporters here last night, Dr Mahathir said the NSC had decided to take stern measures, including whipping, to curb the illegal entry of foreign workers.

The Umno Supreme Council at its meeting on Oct 9 expressed grave concern over the social problems caused by foreign workers and asked the NSC to review their entry.

At present, there are 1.5 million registered foreign workers in the country while the number of illegals is estimated to be equal to that figure.

Jaafar said the amendments to the Act would cover the employment of illegal foreign workers, forging of immigration documents and the penalty for members of syndicates who brought in foreign workers illegally.

He said under the proposed amendments, employers or individuals who employed illegal foreign workers could be fined up to RM10,000 for each illegal worker in their pay.

"If the number of such workers exceeds five, a mandatory jail term of not less than six months can be imposed. These regulations cover executives of companies which employed illegal foreign workers," he said.

Jaafar said for falsification or endorsement of immigration documents, the penalty would be a fine of not less than RM30,000 and a mandatory jail term of not less than five years, plus whipping.

He said members of syndicates involved in bringing in foreign workers illegally could be fined not less than RM30,000 and imposed a mandatory jail term of not less than two years, plus whipping.

Foreign workers who have been deported but return to the country will be whipped, he said.

He said the amendments to the Immigration Act would also be enforced in Sabah, Sarawak and the Labuan Federal Territory.

The amendments had to be made because existing provisions were not specific and the penalties were also found to be not effective as a deterrent, he said.

Jaafar said the presence of illegal foreign workers in Malaysia posed a threat to Malaysia's security.

He said the NSC also viewed with serious concern the foreign workers' activities which were against the customs and values of the local community

and which could affect public order and harmony if left unchecked.

"Even though we still need foreign workers, their presence should be regularised and the foreign workers should abide by the country's laws and be sensitive to the customs of the local community," he said.

He said the NSC also decided that patrols be stepped up along the country's borders and coastlines to prevent the illegal entry of foreigners.

The armed forces, army reserve and Rela members would be mobilised for the purpose and the government would supply them with the equipment to enhance their effectiveness, he said.

Jaafar said the government would discuss with the countries, whose citizens had entered Malaysia illegally in large numbers, the process of systematic repatriation such as using naval vessels of the countries concerned.

He also said the freeze on recruitment of workers from abroad would be maintained for the time being.

However, once the freeze was lifted, approval of applications to recruit foreign workers would depend on employers' ability to provide them with proper accommodation.

He also said random checks would be carried out once the amendments became law. -- BERNAMA

AH RHM AAM