

16/10/1998

Indonesia asks for 2-month extension for illegal workers

Ariff Awang

THE Indonesian Government is asking for a two-month extension for Indonesian illegal workers to facilitate orderly repatriation under a scheme with the cooperation of its Immigration Department.

Counsellor for the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, Ahmad Nawawi Hasbi said, the embassy has forwarded the request to the Deputy Home Minister Datuk Tajol Rosli Gazali and hopes for a positive response by next week.

Ahmad Nawawi explained that the extra two months are requested only for the Indonesian immigrants who have booked tickets on a ship managed by the Indonesian Abri Foundation (Yamabri) and a local company, MJ Titanic (M) Sdn Bhd.

"We expect to ferry some 30,000 of our workers through this arrangement," he said in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The amnesty period for illegal immigrants to volunteer repatriation ends on October 31, as announced by Prime Minister and Home Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last August.

The amnesty programme allows illegal immigrants to return to their home countries within the specified period with no action being taken against them.

MJ Titanic managing director Raja Azlan Raja Hashim said, to date, about 20,000 Indonesians have booked tickets with the company.

Raja Azlan said that "KRE Tanjong Oisina" which will board from Johor Baru to Tanjong Periuk has the capacity to accommodate 2,000 passengers per trip. The first trip is scheduled to board on October 21.

"With this capacity we need at least another two months to complete the shipment process of about 30,000 workers," he said.

Raja Azlan said the company will have to employ an extra vessel, the Telaga Fitma, to speed up repatriation if the extension request was turned down.

Telaga Fitma, Raja Azlan said, has greater capacity of ferrying 2,300 to 2,500 passengers.

The Embassy disclosed that with only two weeks away from the dateline, only 15 per cent of 300,000 estimated illegal immigrants have been repatriated from Malaysia.

(END)