

20/10/1998

Nod for 120,000 more foreign workers

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Government last week approved applications by employers to bring in an additional 120,000 foreign workers into the plantation, manufacturing and construction sectors, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Tajol Rosli Ghazali said today.

He said the new approvals showed that jobs were still aplenty despite the economic problems.

"This coupled with the fact that there are 1.3 million legal foreign workers show that there is still a labour shortage," he said at a Deepavali open house at the Chung Hwa High School here, hosted by MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu.

Tajol Rosli said 20,000 of the newly-approved foreign workers would work in Sarawak and 100,000 in the peninsula.

He said fresh approvals were given based on requirements. The Government had earlier allowed employers to bring in 50,000 additional foreign workers - 30,000 for manufacturing and 20,000 for construction - and an extra 20,000 for Sabah.

He said the newest approval was given by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in his capacity as Home Minister and chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Workers.

"Employers can start bringing in the additional foreign workers effective last week," Tajol Rosli said.

They are coming mostly from Indonesia and Thailand.

The additional workers were required, among others, due to increased construction activity as a result of the introduction of the RM2 billion revolving credit facility for developers.

The facility is aimed at encouraging developers to build more houses priced at RM150,000 and below.

On the amnesty programme which allows illegal foreign workers to leave without being penalised for overstaying on illegal entry, Tajol Rosli said a crackdown against illegal foreign workers would be launched from Nov 1.

It was reported last week that since the Government launched the two-month amnesty programme on Aug 31, only 15 per cent of the estimated 300,000 illegal foreign workers had been repatriated.

One of the major deterrents for the illegals to leave the country had been the minimum RM3,000 fine for overstaying, in addition to the RM1,000 fare.

Tajol Rosli said those who could not get tickets back home before Oct 31 need to have the tickets they bought for later departure endorsed by the Immigration Department to enjoy the benefits under the amnesty programme.

He also advised foreign workers to stay away from illegal gatherings in the country.

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