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Probe into abuse of travel papers

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Immigration Department is investigating the possibility of foreigners deliberately destroying their travel papers as there is an unusually high number of them reporting the loss of these documents.

Immigration director-general Datuk Aseh Che Mat said the element of abuse could not be ruled out following the unusually high number of reports lodged with the Foreign Workers Division.

"We are not ruling out this possibility especially among Bangladeshi workers," he said. However, he did not provide figures.

Aseh said this in a 1999 programme magazine marking the visit of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to the department today. Also present was outgoing Deputy Home Minister Datuk Tajol Rosli Ghazali who has been made Minister in Prime Minister's Department.

The Immigration Department has also received many reports of foreign workers leaving their original employers and working elsewhere.

The department is considering seizing bank guarantees and personal bonds for foreign workers who leave their legal employers.

"There is a need to implement this move as many foreign workers have run away from their legal employers and are working illegally elsewhere.

"The Government will be able to collect millions if the programme is implemented," he said, adding that action would also be taken against 300 blacklisted companies for several wrongdoings perpetrated by their foreign workers.

Last week, Tajol Rosli had said that occupiers of a workplace would be held responsible for any illegal immigrants caught in his or her premises under a proposed amendment to the Immigration Act 1959/63.

The proposed amendment provides for a fine of up to RM30,000 or a maximum sentence of a year's jail or both, for occupiers of workplaces where illegal immigrants or foreign workers without permits are arrested.

A foreign workers' management committee would also be set up to streamline all work processes and the management of foreign workers.

The committee, which would include representatives from all State foreign workers' units and the headquarters, will meet three times a year.

There is also a proposal to set up a special fund where deposits paid by employers for their foreign workers will be kept.

With the setting up of the fund, employers will not have to provide bank guarantees or personal bonds.

"If there are companies which go bankrupt, their deposits in the fund will be available immediately to be used to finance the repatriation of the affected workers," he said, adding that the affected workers would not have to be sent to detention camps.

The department has also introduced a new schedule for employers to renew their foreign workers' permits to avoid last-minute rush.

Those who have workers in the services sector will have to renew the permits between Aug 1 and 15, construction (Aug 16-30), plantation (Sept 1-15) and manufacturing (Sept 16-30).

To ensure the effectiveness of its services, Aseh said all immigration offices would go on-line this year enabling employers to apply for employment passes and expatriate identification cards at any of its offices.

At present, only the Penang, Johor, Malacca and Negri Sembilan offices

are on-line with the headquarters.
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