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Everyone benefits if Indon workers get proper documentation

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RAI and Polman are friendly Balinese who drove many members of the Malaysian Press corps on their assignments last week. The two young men drove their Toyotas from one corner of the island to another as we followed Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Some 20-odd members of the Malaysian media were in Bali to cover the two-day working visit of the Prime Minister to Indonesia on Wednesday and Thursday. Besides acting as our drivers, Rai and Polman were also guides who were eager to tell us everything about their enchanting island.

Thankfully, Dr Mahathir's visit this time around didn't involve too much travelling since most of his meetings took place at the guest house (one of Sukarno's favourite retreats) where he stayed. In between assignments, Rai and Polman took us on a study tour of the island and got us acquainted with some of the local charms.

But these gentlemen aren't ordinary drivers. They work for the Suly Resort, an 18-chalet resort, located in the middle of a padi field in Ubud, famous for its handicraft, works of art and wood and stone sculptures. Rai and Polman are actually multi-tasked employees, capable of also running the resort apart from their vehicles.

Rai particularly appeared more political in his questions of Malaysia and explanations on Bali. The sending back of illegal Indonesian workers from Malaysia to Indonesia in recent weeks seemed to have caught his attention and he wanted to know the actual situation.

We explained to him as clearly as possible, after which he acknowledged that sending them back to where they came from was the right thing to do. In fact, he drew similarities with some outside workers who flock to Bali in search of a decent livelihood.

In his 30s, Rai told us of indiscipline and criminal tendencies found among migrant workers in Bali, most of whom came from other parts of the vast Indonesian archipelago. The Balinese, Rai said, are hardworking people, but the migrant workers tend to give the island a bad name.

"Our livelihood depends on tourists. If we slacken, misbehave and resort to crime, then we will be affected. I suppose it's the same with Malaysia. You can get a bad name just because a small section of the workforce misbehaves."

But not many Indonesians understand the rationale behind the sending back of thousands of their countrymen. They know that Malaysia offers plenty of jobs, decent wages, savings and a better life. They also know that certain sections of the country's economy rely, to some extent, on Indonesian labour and wonder why the workers are rounded up and sent back.

It didn't take long for Rai to accept our explanation, though the same cannot be said of the rest of Indonesia. I get the impression that not everyone in the Indonesian Government understands the reasons for Malaysia's decision to send illegals back to where they belong.

The bad ones aren't just the illegals actually. And they just aren't only Indonesians. The fact that the number of Indonesian illegals far outnumber others gave the impression that only Indonesians are subjected to this treatment. So far, 290,177 illegal immigrants have been deported when the amnesty expired on July 31.

Of these, 243,772 were Indonesians, 18,933 Indians, 16,648 Bangladeshis and 2,902 from Myanmar.

Those who chose not to give up and be deported now risk legal action as

provided by the laws. Those who return can, of course, seek to resume employment here, but with the proper legal documentation. And the Indonesian authorities, more than others, will have to show their commitment by helping their citizens get proper documentation for them to eke a decent halal living, which will benefit everyone.