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Abdullah-Amnesty

NO DECISION ON EXTENSION OF AMNESTY FOR ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS

KUALA LUMPUR, July 30 (Bernama) -- The government has not decided on extending tomorrow's deadline on the amnesty given to illegal immigrants to leave the country, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

"I am not going to say anything yet on the amnesty or as far as the date is concerned until I get some feedback," the deputy prime minister told reporters when asked whether the government would extend the deadline following appeals by some employers.

Earlier, he opened a seminar on "Biotechnology Awareness and Entrepreneurship at the Putra World Trade Centre, here.

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said he had directed the ministry's secretary-general, Datuk Seri Aseh Che Mat, to discuss the matter with employers facing problems.

He said the government understood their problems but the important thing now was that the illegal immigrants must stop working here and sent home.

Immigration Director-General Datuk Mohamed Jamal Kamdi reiterated yesterday that the amnesty period would not be extended and that those with tickets dated after tomorrow were required to register and obtain special passes to temporarily "legalise" their stay.

The government has offered the amnesty from March this year until tomorrow to allow illegal immigrants to leave the country before the enforcement of the amended Immigration Act 1959.

Under the new provisions of the Act, illegal immigrants risk being whipped and fined a maximum of RM10,000 or jailed not exceeding five years.

Abdullah said those employing foreign workers were always complaining about the difficulty in getting local workers despite advertising the vacancies and that local workers were choosy and refused to accept low wages which had forced them to recruit foreign workers.

He said some employers gave the excuse that if they did not get foreign workers, they would have to close their factories as a result of which the local workers would also lose their jobs.

"This is the kind of argument given by the employers all the time but what I want to stress is that don't use this argument as an easy way out. We don't want the locals being jobless and the foreign workers being given employment," he said.

The government would also take appropriate measures to prevent other problems arising from the possibility of some industries being affected and not being able to operate following the deportation of foreign workers, he said.

Abdullah was also asked to comment on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's speech last night that the Malays now face two new dilemmas as to whether they want to let a so-called Islamic party destroy them and the country and whether they should do away with "crutches" to become a successful race.

He said that what Dr Mahathir said was true and he shared his sentiments.

Abdullah said a democratic system had its pros and cons, depending on how it was put into practice.

Abdullah said the government hoped that the people would be wise in choosing the best government to ensure that Malaysia continued to be progressive, safe and peaceful.

On the practice of political parties using religion to get the people's support, he said it would endanger the country if it became a trend.

-- BERNAMA

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