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Indon-Workers

ABOUT 300,000 REPATRIATED INDON WORKERS MAY RETURN TO M'SIA

JAKARTA, July 30 (Bernama) -- About 300,000 illegal Indonesian workers in Malaysia repatriated in stages under the current operation may return to the country once they obtain their work permits, a labour ministry official said today.

Deputy head of the South Sulawesi Labour and Transmigration Department Sjahrir Tadjuddin said that an estimated 450,000 illegal workers were taking advantage of the amnesty arrangement but out of that, some 300,000 who had been working for years in Malaysia could not resist returning for a better fortune.

"Of course, their return will take place after they obtain legal working documents," he was quoted as saying by local portal news network, detikcom.

He said the lure of returning to work in Malaysia came from their employers who were prepared to pay for their trip and the cost of processing the documents required.

"Right now, in Nunukan alone the Immigration Department is releasing about 1,000 new passports daily to applicants from among the repatriated workers," he said.

He said no less than 2,000 applications were received daily for the travel documents which the workers had to obtain before they could apply for permits to work in Malaysia.

Nunukan, just a stone's throw away from Tawau which shares the border with East Kalimantan, had seen the exodus of thousands of illegal Indonesian workers since two weeks ago following Malaysia's crackdown on them.

Come Thursday, Malaysia will implement harsh new immigration laws which provide for a mandatory six months jail and possibly up to six strokes of the cane for illegal entry and harbouring of illegal immigrants.

Currently, offenders only face up to five years in jail or a fine of not more than RM10,000 but in most cases, the courts only impose the fines.

The strict measures came about following violence by Indonesian workers at a textile company in Nilai, Seremban, on Jan 17 this year with 15 of them held responsible for the incident.

The incident also prompted Malaysia, which is home to about about half million Indonesian workers, to limit their numbers and restrict them to certain sectors only.

The Malaysian cabinet had in February decided that the recruitment of foreign workers be carried out under a government-to-government agreement to avoid problems like foreign workers being cheated or not being able to find employment as promised in Malaysia.

Last week, Indonesia Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda gave a commitment that Indonesia would send the repatriated workers back to Malaysia only after giving them proper training as well as proper travel documents and work permits.

He said the Indonesian workers issue would be brought up during high-level talks between President Megawati Sukarnoputri and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who will visit Indonesia on Aug 7 and 8, in Bali.

-- BERNAMA

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