

11/09/2002

PM: No plan to prosecute employers of illegal aliens

BANGI, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Government has no intention of taking action against employers who had employed illegal immigrants in the past.

The Prime Minister said it was too late to act against the unscrupulous employers now as their illegal foreign workers have returned to their respective countries.

"We should have taken action when they (illegal immigrants) were still here. We cannot take action now (because) the people have already gone," he said.

He said this in response to questions as to why the Government was not acting against employers who employed illegal immigrants before the Government's blanket amnesty and subsequent deportation of illegal immigrants.

Dr Mahathir was speaking after opening the Malaysia France Institute here.

Employers who had employed illegal immigrants have complained to the Government that they faced shortage of manpower due to the decision to deport the aliens.

It was understood the Immigration Department had lost more than RM400 million annually from foreign workers' levy due to the employment of illegal immigrants.

Employers, especially those in the construction and plantation sectors, are also known to prefer illegal immigrants as they would not be bound by any rules or regulations, on top of not having to pay foreign workers levy to the Government.

"Now we have to go on, with the construction in particular, and they (foreign workers) must come through the legal means," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked if employers were in any way holding the Government to ransom as the authorities seemed to have reversed the earlier policy of sectoral distribution of foreign workers, he said that was not the case.

"No, not reverse ... if they (employers) want to have foreign workers, they must only employ the legal ones. So employers will have to pay," Dr Mahathir explained, adding that penalising the errant employers (who had employed illegal immigrants in the past) was not conducive in the current environment.

"(If) we penalise them, we (are) penalising ourselves ... the construction industry is not moving," he said, pointing to the heavy reliance on foreign workers in the building industry.

Malaysia set July 31 as the last day for illegal immigrants to leave the country or face caning and jail.