

Govt to deport 500,000 workers

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Gothom urges authorities to be lenient with the Burmese

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Starting from today, relevant authorities are getting ready to deport about half a million Burmese, Laotian and Cambodian workers because they failed to seek new work permits and/or submit requests for nationality verification within the deadline.

Yesterday was the last day for the 1.3 million or so Burmese, Laotian and Cambodian people working in Thailand to hand over requests or applications to the authorities. This is a mandatory step for workers who have already registered in Thailand's labour market in recent years.

"We will not be lenient," Employment Department's deputy director-general Supat Gukun said yesterday referring to workers who missed the deadline.

He added that his department would work closely with the police and the Immigration Bureau in enforcing the law.

"We will have to arrest and deport those alien workers who have not kept in line with prescribed procedures," Supat said, pointing out that under the procedure, registered aliens would be given access to legal protection and welfare.

Moreover, Supat insisted the nationality-verification process was not very complicated.

"For extra convenience, employers can hire one of the 12 certified private companies to handle the task of verifying the nationality of their workers for no more than Bt5,000 per head," he added.

Many employers have sought the service, with the companies earning more than a total of Bt1 billion.

The nationality-verification process has recently been made mandatory, in addition to the long-existing requirement for alien workers to carry a work permit.

The process has two main steps:

1 Employers fill nationality-verification forms and submit them to the Labour Ministry, which will then forward these documents to the governments of Burma, Laos and Cambodia for verification.

2 Once the documents are verified, the alien workers can return home to get passports. Thailand has given alien workers until 2012 to get their passports.

Since work permits issued to alien workers expire on March 2, they all had until yesterday to renew their permits.

Meanwhile, Human Rights and Development Foundation chairman Gothom Arya yesterday urged the government to not deport the alien workers who failed to meet the March 2 deadline.

"Some Burmese workers feel their lives are at risk if they have to go back to their country. Political and ethnical conflicts are still going on there," he said.

He also urged the government to extend the deadline for registered alien workers' nationality verification.

Gothom said if Thai authorities refused to extend the deadline, many Burmese workers would simply go underground and live here illegally.

"Some corrupt officials might then exploit these people," he said.