

Employers say biometric system ‘riddled with problems’

By Shannon Teoh

Aug 01, 2011

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 1 — Employers have raised doubts over the government’s new biometric system that is being used to register both legal and illegal immigrants, claiming that the process is riddled with problems.

Concerns have already been raised over Malaysia’s readiness to process illegal immigrants on the back of an asylum swap deal with Australia, with 54 boatpeople picked up yesterday by Canberra destined for Malaysian shores within a few weeks.

A major talking point in the deal was the lack of human rights guarantees for the 800 boatpeople who will be transferred to Malaysia, but today’s complaints over the biometric system will likely cause further protests that will extend damage to both governments, especially the Gillard administration in Australia.

The Australian reported today that at least two more asylum boats were being prepared as smugglers looked to exploit loopholes in the deal that will also see Australia expand its humanitarian intake and resettle 4,000 refugees from Malaysia over four years. It will also be footing the bill of nearly RM1 billion.

Malaysian employers today said that their failure to register half of the 1.2 million foreign workers on their books was due to the biometric system being “riddled with problems” and called for the government to suspend its amnesty programme for illegal immigrants currently in the country.

“To carry out both exercises in parallel is a massive task which the authorities are unable to handle,” Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director Shamsuddin Bardan told Bernama Online today.

The amnesty programme was initially schedule to begin on July 11 but was postponed due to problems in appointing agents. The biometric machines were also not yet in place.

Tenaganita executive director Dr Irene Fernandes said that the continual changes were causing confusion for employers, workers, foreign missions and even some Immigration officers on the ground.

“Unless proper planning is made, the whole exercise would be a failure,” she said to Bernama Online.

Malaysian Agriculture Plantation Association executive director Mohamad Audong added the biometric system exercise had caused much inconvenience to his members because of insufficient registration centres.

The refugee swap, which has been condemned by the Australian Parliament, has seen the popularity of its leader Julia Gillard and her Labor government lag behind that of the opposition coalition.

Human rights activists in Malaysia have also criticised Putrajaya for going ahead without first ratifying United Nations conventions on the rights of refugees.

The “6P” amnesty programme by the home ministry is aimed at gathering data on illegal immigrants, such as their place of work, employer and salary in the attempt to overcome social and crime issues often linked to these people.