



FERNANDEZ:
How were
they lured?

Get the agents, say NGOs

Middlemen the root of 'missing' Indian citizens problem

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KUALA LUMPUR: Non-governmental organisations Tenaganita and Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) are hoping that the government will not only focus on the 40,000 Indian citizens "missing" after their tourist visas-on-arrival expired, but also on the agents who brought them into the country.

Tenaganita director Dr Irene Fernandez told *The Malay Mail*: "Most of the illegal workers who come from India usually go through an agent and these work-

ers are often given misleading information.

"For example, most of them are told they would be getting high salaries. As such, they don't mind risking their hard-earned savings to pay these agents."

She said the foreign workers were here because they were forced to by their employers and left with no other choice but to overstay.

"The government must know what the factors contributing to these 'missing' Indian citizens are.

"Also, many of these Indian workers are promised jobs by their agents. But when they get here,

there are no jobs available."

Based on Tenaganita's experience, she said, most of the Indian nationals end up in the plantation industry, working at restaurants or becoming odd-job labourers.

She said the authorities should obtain the errant employers' details and also note how these foreign workers were lured into the country.

MEF executive director Samsudin Baradan said the government had been too lenient with foreign workers in the past as amnesty or voluntary repatriation were frequently offered.

"If we had to carry out the

amnesty regularly, it would look as if there was a problem with our overall monitoring system."

He echoed Tenaganita's views that the government should get to the core of the problem and the blame should be placed squarely on the agents.

"One agent could be responsible for about 1,000 illegal workers. If we can find the agents, then the whereabouts of these 'missing' workers can be tracked down as well."

Both NGOs agreed that a deterrent punishment should be imposed on these errant parties as what they are doing is tantamount to a human trafficking offence.