

# Employers: Suspend amnesty programme for illegal workers

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Employers and worker organisations want the Government to suspend the amnesty programme for the 1.2 million illegal workers which began yesterday.

They argued that the ongoing exercise to register legal workers using the biometric system was incomplete and riddled with problems.

"To carry out both exercises simultaneously was a massive task which the authorities were unable to handle," Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director Shamsuddin Bardan said.

The amnesty programme was supposed to begin on July 11, but was postponed because the Home Ministry had problems in appointing agents while the machinery to register the workers was not in place.

Instead, the ministry decided to use the biometric system to register legal workers two weeks ago, and it is still in progress with no definite deadline to complete it.

Shamsuddin said the biometric system was riddled with problems that needed to be ironed out fast.

So far, only 600,000 legal workers out of the estimated 1.2 million had been registered.

With so many changes made to the pro-

gramme within the last month, all stakeholders — employers, workers, foreign missions and even some Immigration officers on the ground — were confused, noted Tenaganita executive director Dr Irene Fernandes.

"Unless proper planning is made, the whole exercise would be a failure," she said.

Fernandes suggested that the ministry provide clear guidelines on the amnesty programme and ensure it had the capacity to monitor the registration so that workers and employers were not cheated.

MTUC vice-president A. Balasubramaniam urged the ministry to rope in Labour Department officials and representatives of worker organisations to help in the massive exercise.

"The exercise should not be left to private sector agents who are profit-driven," he said, adding that the suspension of the exercise would give time for the authorities to properly plan and overcome the shortcomings it currently faced.

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



**Lesson in patience:** Thousands of foreign workers waiting to be processed at the KL Stadium in Cheras yesterday.