

Alternative plan for Viet illegals

NST 25 APR 1988

By SYED ABU BAKAR

ALOR STAR, Sun. — Malaysia will provide an alternative plan for the Vietnamese illegal immigrants on Pulau Bidong off Terengganu before going ahead with the decision to close the transit camp, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said in line with this the Federal Government will hold further talks with the relevant international agencies and the Terengganu Government.

Various aspects have to be studied before the camp could be closed, he told reporters before leaving for Kuala Lumpur after an overnight visit during which he and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah broke fast with residents at the Kampung Kandis mosque near here.

Dr Mahathir said although Malaysia had already announced it wanted to shut down the camp this was not as easy as "opening and closing a door".

The Government would have to make a thorough study and hold discussions with the agencies involved in resettling the illegal immigrants in third countries and also the State Government.

The Foreign Ministry had earlier been directed by the Federal Government to start

P. Bidong
will not
be closed
yet: PM

talks with Vietnam, third countries and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) on the resettling of the illegal immigrants.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Yusof Nor had said last Thursday that the camp would be closed within a year after the talks.

He had said the decision was made in view of appeals from the local people who wanted the island as a fishing base.

About 5,000 Vietnamese illegal immigrants are still on the island awaiting resettlement.

The Prime Minister also told reporters that no decision had been made on the appointment of a new president of the Senate to replace Tan Sri Ben Stephens, whose term of office expired recently.