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MAHATHIR SAYS NO REASON TO APOLOGISE TO PHILIPPINES

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KUALA LUMPUR, April 6 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said there is no reason for Malaysia to apologise to the Philippines over the recent roundup of over 1,000 Filipino maids in the compound of St John's Church here.

The Prime Minister said the action had no connection with religion as it was a normal operation by the authorities.

"Before this we have detained Muslim illegal immigrants who were in mosques but it was not reported and did not become an issue," he told reporters at an Aidil Fitri gathering with the media hosted by Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat here tonight.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on a Philippine senator's demand recently that the Malaysian government apologise for the incident.

In the operation, police discovered 711 of the more than 1,000 Filipino maids detained did not have work permits and travel documents. -- more

▼06/04/23-06MST

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However, all the Filipinas were later released after their employers presented their work permits except for 31 who remained in police custody on suspicion of having committed various offences.

Dr Mahathir said some people labelled the roundup of the Filipino maids in a church compound as a deliberate action by a Muslim-majority government.

"But I wish to state that many Muslim illegal immigrants have been arrested while sleeping in mosques...there were no complaints," he said.

However, he said, in the case of the Filipino maids, they complained because they had the impression it was done on purpose and the Malaysian government did not care for other religions.

He described the roundup as an "unfortunate" event as it involved people who were inside a church compound. -- more

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Dr Mahathir said that even though the police took various precautions, the government wanted them to exercise more care to avoid allegations that they did not respect places of worship.

In this connection, the Prime Minister who is also Home Minister had instructed all the relevant authorities to be more sensitive in carrying out their duties, particularly where it involved arrests in places related to religion.

"They should avoid making arrests in places of worship so as not to be misunderstood by any side," he said.

Deputy Home Minister Datuk Megat Junid Megat Ayob said yesterday the police operation at the church was to flush out illegal immigrants.

They were merely performing their duties under the law and the action was not meant to harass Christians, Megat Junid had said. -- Bernama

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