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Mahathir-Australia

STUDENTS TO BE RECALLED IF IN DANGER, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 16 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will recall its more than 11,000 students in Australia if they are found to be in danger in the wake of reports of racial abuse in that country, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the government wanted to get a clear picture of the situation in Australia "and if it is true that there is danger, we will act".

"It is either we recall them or give them protection," he said when commenting on a call for Malaysian students in Australia to be offered government protection from racial abuse and threats.

When making the call, Adrina Shazlin Shukor, who is deputy president of the Melbourne Umno Club, said she had a frightening experience recently when a youth verbally abused her for being Asian. She returned home for her holidays yesterday.

Most of the Malaysian students are in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth.

The government had not received any official complaint from Malaysian students in Australia about the threat to their safety, Dr Mahathir told reporters after launching a national campaign to promote the savings habit.

However, he said the government was watching the situation.

Dr Mahathir said the Malaysian High Commission would help to ensure the safety of the students, and if necessary the Australian government would be asked to protect the Malaysians.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians were taking a risk if they chose to visit Australia.

Incidents of threats and violence against Asians in Australia were reported to have increased since independent Member of Parliament Pauline Hanson made a controversial statement against Asian immigrants there.

Meanwhile, Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the ministry was aware of incidents of racial abuse against Malaysian students in Australia and was giving attention to the matter.

However, the situation there did not warrant an immediate recall of the students, he said.

"We know of the incidents and although the situation is under control, the students are advised to walk in groups and to avoid going out alone," he told reporters after launching the Stamford Institute branch in Ampang here.

He said the Australians also knew that if they objected to the presence of Asians their actions would affect their own future.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi regretted that racial abuse by a small group of Australians was continuing.

"I hope that these racists are not representing all the Australians," he said.

While advising Malaysians in Australia to be careful, he said Canberra must be extra cautious to ensure that there was no untoward incident. --

BERNAMA

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