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Thailand agrees to tighten rules on transit visa

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Thailand has agreed to tighten procedures for the issuance of transit visas to travellers from some countries, including Bangladesh, to prevent them from entering Malaysia illegally, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said Bangladeshis entering Thailand using the transit visas would be required to show proof to the Thai authorities that they were genuine travellers to Malaysia.

He said the transit visas given to Bangladeshis allowing them to remain in Thailand for a certain period were used by them to enter Malaysia illegally via the Malaysia-Thai border.

"Thailand has agreed to help ... the traveller has to show proof and means to enter our country. If the person has no such proof, they will not be given the transit visas," he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after bidding farewell to Thai Prime Minister Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh at the end of the latter's two-day visit, at the Regent hotel. Also present was Dr Mahathir's wife, Datin Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

Chavalit and his wife Khunying Phankrua Yongchaiyudh and his 42-member delegation, comprising permanent secretaries of various ministries and senior government officials arrived yesterday.

Dr Mahathir had brought up the issue (of the Bangladeshis' illegal entry) and sought Thailand's co-operation to curb the flow of illegal immigrants through the common border during his meeting with the Thai Prime Minister.

Malaysia had complained about the large number of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar crossing into the country through its border with Thailand.

Dr Mahathir said the issuance of the transit visas by the Thai authorities without stricter verification would enable the foreigners to enter Malaysia illegally.

Malaysia would then be required to send them back into Thailand, he said.

Dr Mahathir added that the Bangladeshis applied for the transit visas as if they wanted to enter the country legally when, in actual fact, their intention was otherwise.

On whether a tripartite meeting between Malaysia, Bangladesh and Thailand would be held to discuss the matter, Dr Mahathir said the country's concern had been conveyed to Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad who visited the country last week.

On the dispute over the border demarcation, Dr Mahathir said the 60-day deadline had been set, effective yesterday, to resolve all disputes at the Government level.

While the matter could be resolved by the Malaysian Government at the Cabinet level, the Thai Government has to refer it to the country's Parliament for the final decision, he added.

"It is up to the (Thai) Parliament to decide on the matter and he (Chavalit) cannot give an assurance ... However, he will try to resolve this problem."

Dr Mahathir and Chavalit, during their bilateral talks yesterday, agreed that outstanding issues be resolved under the "no gain and no loss" principle.

Both countries are confident of meeting the deadline as extensive discussions on the border demarcation have been held at various levels for the past 15 years and the problems are confined to only a few areas.

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