

28 FEB 1997

Mahathir-Visa

THAILAND WILL CONTROL GIVING OF TRANSIT VISAS, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 28 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Thailand will tighten the issuance of transit visas in efforts to help Malaysia overcome the problem of illegal entry through that country.

Dr Mahathir said Thai Prime Minister Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh had given an assurance that Thailand would no longer give transit visas to foreign visitors unless they have proof that they could proceed to third countries.

"If there is no proof, it will not give the transit visa," he told reporters after bidding farewell to Chavalit at a hotel, here.

He said that all this while foreign visitors had abused the transit visa given by the Thai authorities.

"He (the visitor) asks for a transit visa giving the impression that he can come to Malaysia when he cannot," he said.

The transit visas is issued by the Thai authorities to foreign visitors using that country as a transit point to other nations.

Dr Mahathir said Thailand only gave the transit visa and it was up to the visitor whether or not to visit other places.

"So for it (Thailand), it only gives the transit visa but we know that if it gives the visa, we have a problem because he (foreign visitor) cannot go to Malaysia," Dr Mahathir said.

The issue surfaced following the influx of Bangladeshi immigrants who entered Malaysia illegally through Thailand after obtaining transit visas.

With the latest development, foreign visitors must prove, among others, that they had travel documents and money before they are given transit visas.

On plans for a tripartite meeting among Bangladesh, Thailand and Malaysia on the problem of Bangladeshi illegal immigrants in this country, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had informed Bangladesh of the matter during the recent visit of its foreign minister.

Dr Mahathir had a 30-minute meeting with Chavalit who ended his two-day visit here today.

He said that during the meeting Chavalit said he would try to resolve the Malaysia-Thailand border demarcation problem at the government level within 60 days but could not give a guarantee on parliamentary approval.

"While the border problem in Malaysia is resolved a cabinet level, in Thailand it has to be tabled in Parliament for approval," he said.

The border demarcation problem had dragged on for 15 years due, among others, to the rivers, which are used to mark the border, changing course following floods.

At a meeting of Malaysian and Thai delegations here yesterday, both countries agreed to resolve the problem based on two principles -- to mark a permanent border that will not be altered by the shifting positions of the rivers and to jointly develop border areas that are difficult to demarcate. -- BERNAMA

JM JK