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PM: Repatriation of illegals will not affect Asean spirit

REPATRIATION of illegal foreign workers will not endanger the spirit of partnership and solidarity among countries in the Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean), Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Dr Mahathir said although security at Malaysia's borders is expected to be tightened, it is not likely to affect ties with Asean neighbours.

"This will not jeopardise the spirit of Asean.

"Our neighbours are having some problems and some of their people are coming over. We are also experiencing some problems of our own and are not able to 'entertain' them. If we are able to help them, we will," he told reporters in Petaling Jaya yesterday after launching the National Smart Partnership Dialogue.

The Prime Minister was asked to comment on the influx in the number of illegals in the country due to the economic problems faced by Indonesia and Thailand.

"If we help the recovery of their economies, this by itself will reduce the number of illegals entering the country," he said.

Malaysia, he added, had discussed the issue with its neighbours and it was agreed that the host country has the right to send back those without any valid entry permits.

Dr Mahathir also said the Government will look into the cost of borrowings for infrastructure projects.

When asked about the liquidity problem encountered by the Kuala Lumpur Monorail project, he said, "There is no problem.

"They can borrow money from the banks ... the banks have the money maybe the cost is a problem but the Government will look into this. I was told that the interest rates have gone down," he said.

The RM1.9 billion project was scheduled to be completed by September this year to complement public transportation for the Commonwealth Games. When completed the monorail project will provide public transport to the central business, hotel and shopping district. It will have 21 stations and be capable of handling between 200,000 and 250,000 passengers.

The concessionaire of the monorail project, KL PRT Sdn Bhd, while denying that the project had been abandoned said it is unlikely to be completed in time for the Games.

The company is currently reviewing its construction programme and working out a new financing arrangement in view of the prevailing economic situation.

On Taiwan, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia maintains its "One China" policy but will continue to welcome investments from Taiwan into the country.

"The One China policy stands ... we have economic relations with Taiwan. In the past, there have been substantial investments from Taiwan and we hope that these will continue," he said.

He was commenting on a question asked by a Taiwanese reporter as to how Taiwan is able to help in the recovery of the Malaysian economy.

Dr Mahathir said the low offshore borrowings by the Government and the private sector, coupled with Malaysia's prudent and conservative financial management, have managed to bolster the country during the period of currency and economic problems, he said.

When asked if he will be inviting Taiwanese President Lee Teng Hui to visit Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said, "At the moment, we do not have plans to

do so."

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