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PM: Reports of poisoning `baseless`

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Reports by two British newspapers that Malaysian authorities had mass poisoned and killed Indonesian illegal immigrants at detention centres were baseless and unfounded, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"I don't understand why we should mass poison them, when we can actually send thousands of them back to Indonesia.

"The repatriation exercise is being carried out smoothly. Why should there be a need for us to kill them?"

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, was speaking to reporters after a special meeting with party divisional leaders at the Putra World Trade Centre.

The Observer front-paged a report three days ago, claiming that Malaysia had mass poisoned defenceless refugees and migrant workers in detention camps.

The newspaper claimed that the poisonings made detainees vomit blood and triggered riots which were brutally suppressed, "ringleaders" were shot dead, and others tortured, beaten and robbed before being deported.

On Monday, The Independent quoted Amnesty International as saying that Malaysia's determination to deport illegals was putting thousands of people at risk of illness, injury and political persecution.

Asked to comment on the reports, Dr Mahathir said the Indonesian Government understood Malaysia's predicament and the need to repatriate them to their homeland.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, said the West had in fact "poisoned" Indonesia by attacking the rupiah and forcing its depreciation.

"This resulted in 20 million Indonesians losing their jobs. They did not lose their jobs because of the Indonesian Government but because the rupiah was attacked and devalued.

"Everything was caused by the same type of people as the writers of these newspaper reports."

On whether this was an attempt to force the Government to open up the detention centres to human right groups and organisations, Dr Mahathir said:

"Human rights groups would not be satisfied until the detainees are placed in five-star hotels. If the human rights groups are willing to finance, we are willing to put them in Shangri-La (Hotel)."

Asked how the foreign media had obtained pictures of the happenings inside the detention centres, the Prime Minister said:

"Well, I wouldn't like to say it, but somebody obviously got something for them (the pictures). One of the things that we want to eliminate is corruption.

"Corruption takes many forms. This kind of pictures can be obtained through corruption."

When asked whether police photographers could have supplied the photographs to the foreign media, he said:

"Yes, maybe they can get police photographers to give it to them."

Dr Mahathir said with the aid of some Malaysians, those from the West wanted to destroy Malaysia.

"What I say may sound extreme, but this is the effect of what they do.

"Now these pictures will be broadcast over BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)."

Dr Mahathir said when a Hindu guru was arrested in a "civilised country" and his legs and arms were chained by the authorities, it was not shown on TV. "But if we do that, you can be sure that it will be on TV."

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