

02/04/1998

Rahim: Acehnese not singled out

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - In the effort to repatriate illegal immigrants, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Noor said today there was no discrimination against the Acehnese of Sumatra.

He chided the foreign media and certain non-governmental organisations which believed allegations of police brutality against those from Aceh, particularly during rioting at the Semenyih Immigration Detention Centre on March 26, where a policeman and eight Indonesian illegal immigrants were killed.

"My reply to the NGOs' allegations ... try and imagine how they (the NGOs) as policemen, would react when confronted by the illegals during the rioting at Semenyih," he told Bernama.

On Monday, 14 Indonesian illegal immigrants in a canvas-top lorry forced their way into the regional office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Jalan Bukit Petaling.

Claiming to be refugees from Aceh and seeking political asylum, they distributed handwritten statements alleging police mistreatment during a riot at the Lenggeng detention centre in Negri Sembilan, apart from claiming their food was spiked.

Asked to comment on the statement, Rahim said, it smacked more of politics, adding that Malaysia neither interfered in the problems of Aceh nor provided political asylum to those from the province.

He also rapped the Aceh/Sumatra National Liberation Front for allegations of Malaysian brutality.

Foreigners who entered illegally, would continue to be regarded as illegals.

"They (Acehnese) can bark, but remember, all this while they were on Malaysian soil," he added.

Meanwhile, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Tajol Rosli Ghazali said the Government had not decided on the next course of action if UNHCR decided to grant refugee status to the 14.

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also the Home Minister, would have to make the decision.

Tajol was asked by reporters, who met him near Istana Negara today, on the Government's stand should the UNHCR grant refugee status to the 14.

Yesterday, the UNHCR was given two weeks to determine their status after a meeting between the head of the liaison office, Gottfried Koefner, and Foreign Ministry deputy secretary-general, Datuk Ghazzali Sheikh Khalid.

Later, at the Parliament lobby, Tajol said the decision not to recognise the 14 as political refugees was to avoid allowing the hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants to make similar claims.

Citing an example, he said the Vietnamese boat people had made such claims.

"We sympathise with them (Acehnese) but we too, are not in a position to accommodate them.

"If they come in the hundreds of thousands, where are we going to put them? They will need jobs. If they don't have jobs, who will look after their welfare," he said.

In Tawau, police have detained six suspected agents for illegal immigrants under the Internal Security Act for allegedly smuggling them into the country.

The six - Kadir Ambotwo, 47, Ramli Ahmad @ Ramli Kapiting, 39, Ruding

Anci, 42, Manja Bata, 50, Hamzah Gani, 38 and Hamjah Dullah, 34, - were from a neighbouring country and had valid travel documents.

State Police Commissioner, Acting Deputy Commissioner Amir Junus, said they were picked up from their houses in Kampung Titingan and Tanjung Batu Darat yesterday morning under Section 73 (1) of the ISA.

Police also arrested four illegal immigrants found with the agents during the operation between 6am and 7am.

Amir said this was the first time agents for illegal immigrants were detained in the State.

In Malacca, police detained 14 Indonesians believed to be Acehnese, who had no valid travel documents, on Monday.

Deputy Superintendent Farid Mahmud, said police were checking if they were members of the Aceh Liberation Front.

In Kuantan, State Immigration Department director Alwi Bavutty said the remaining 281 illegal immigrants at the Kemayan detention centre in Temerloh would be deported soon.

They comprised 98 Indonesians, including one from Aceh, and 183 others.

(END)