

02 MAR 1998

Mahathir-Migrants

REPATRIATION OF ILLEGALS WILL NOT AFFECT ASEAN SPIRIT- MAHATHIR

PETALING JAYA, March 2 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia's move to step up patrols along the coastal areas to check illegal entry by migrant workers will not affect the overall Asean spirit of friendship and solidarity.

"We cannot accept the illegals. If we can, we will help. If we cannot how are we to help..... this repatriation will not affect the Asean spirit."

In the course of discussions among the countries facing economic problems, they agreed it was the right of nations including Malaysia to repatriate people who tried to enter illegally.

"If we can help in their economic recovery this by itself will reduce the number of cases of illegal entry," he told reporters.

Malaysia could not accept illegal migrant workers as she herself was facing economic problems, he said.

The Prime Minister last week discussed the illegal entry of migrant workers from countries worst affected by the economic crisis with Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei.

When reporters asked the Prime Minister about the MTUC-Cuepacs boycott of chicken, he said the government's reason for approving a rise in the price of chicken was clear -- due to rising production costs.

Many poultry farms had to close down because they were losing money but some were still carrying on in the hope of recovering their losses, he said.

On the first session of the National Smart Partnership Dialogue today, Dr Mahathir said it dealt with how the government, the private sector and trade unions could cooperate to bring about economic recovery for their common benefit. -- BERNAMA

RAZ AZZ AAM