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Repatriation of illegals will go on (HL)

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JITRA, Fri. - The Government is firm in its decision to repatriate Indonesian illegal immigrants despite violent resistance from them which resulted in the death of nine people, including a policeman yesterday.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said there was no way the Government would reverse its decision to deport them because "it is too costly to allow them to remain in the country".

"We have to send them back ... no way are we going to change our stand ... We have no place for them ... it incurs huge expenses to keep and control them and also provide them with food and shelter," he said when asked whether the violent clashes with the police at the Semenyih Immigration Detention Centre in Selangor had affected the Government's decision to deport the Indonesian illegal immigrants.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, spoke to reporters after opening the Kubang Pasu Umno divisional delegates' conference at Dewan Jitra.

In yesterday's riot, the detainees, armed with iron rods attacked the policemen when they learnt they were about to be repatriated to Aceh in Sumatra. They also set fire to five blocks of dormitories.

Twenty-seven policemen were also injured, two seriously.

The riot in Semenyih was one of three reported at detention camps. The other riots were at Lenggeng in Negri Sembilan and Machap Umbo in Malacca.

On the riot, Dr Mahathir said the police had to use force to defend themselves after the detainees attacked and killed one of the policemen.

Asked whether the centre in Semenyih was suitable as a detention centre, Dr Mahathir said the Government had never expected such an incident to occur.

"We are only wise after the event ... before the incident, nobody tells us that a detention centre should not have iron rods and barbed wires.

"We have spent substantially on these detainees because if we don't, there will be quarters like the non-governmental organisations making noise.

On a suggestion that the immigrants refused to return because they feared action would be taken against them in Indonesia, the Prime Minister said they had to accept the fact that they were the citizens of that country.

Moreover, he said the Indonesian Government was willing to accept them back.

Asked whether the Indonesian Government had reacted to the incident, Dr Mahathir said he was not aware if they had.

On whether the Government would expedite the repatriation following the incident, Dr Mahathir said the deportation process was not an easy one as it involved proper arrangement and control.

In Kuala Lumpur, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Noor said the move to repatriate Indonesian illegal immigrants was an immediate measure to alleviate the Government's financial and security burden and to overcome congestion at the eight Immigration detention centres.

Moreover, he said the police had to deal with hardcore illegal immigrants who were serious in their bid to resist deportation.

"We expect to clear as many Indonesian illegal immigrants as possible over the next few days," added Rahim at the Kuala Lumpur Hospital after visiting an injured policeman who was warded, following yesterday's clash.

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