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Mahathir - immigrants

REPATRIATION OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS TO PROCEED, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, April 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight reiterated that Malaysia is sticking to its stand to continue repatriating illegal immigrants.

"Our stand on repatriating all illegal immigrants remains the same," said Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, at a press conference after chairing a party Supreme Council meeting at the World Trade Centre here.

The prime minister was responding to a question from a foreign correspondent on deportation of illegal immigrants.

News reports from Jakarta said Malaysia had ill treated Indonesian illegal immigrants, including those injured during rioting by those resisting repatriation from a detention centre in Semenyih last March 29.

To this Dr Mahathir, who is also the Home Minister, said: "It's a matter of opinion. We've done our best. If they start fighting, the police have to take action."

In the incident a policeman from the Federal Reserve Unit and eight Indonesian illegal immigrants were killed and several others injured.

Dr Mahathir said the Supreme Council also discussed the dispute between Hindus and Muslims in Kampung Rawa, Pulau Pinang and considered the matter as closed.

"Tonight the Hindus celebrate a religious festival and I have not received any complaint of any untoward incident," he said.

The issue was only confined to Pulau Pinang, said Dr Mahathir, who is also the Home Minister.

"The Kampung Rawa incident is over but we must be very careful as there are irresponsible elements out to incite sentiments," he said.

He said any dispute should be resolved through negotiations.

Preventive action would have to be taken before any issue got out of control, he said.

Dr Mahathir said the meeting also discussed open burning and welcomed a government proposal to compel those involved to bear the costs of putting out the fire.

He said this would be additional penalty for those deliberately committing open burning besides fines and five years imprisonment upon conviction.

"The sterner action is necessary as the government views open burning as a crime," he said.

Presently those involved in open burning face fines up to RM100,000 or five years imprisonment or both upon conviction.

On Selayang Umno division chief Datuk Saidin Thamby being investigated for allegedly receiving a cheque for RM1 million, Dr Mahathir said investigation by the party management and disciplinary committee was ongoing.

Asked about the time-frame for the probe, Dr Mahathir replied in lighter vein: "There are still 15 months more." -- BERNAMA

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