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Deportation not a violation of human rights, says PM

MALAYSIA has not violated any human rights with its decision to deport illegal migrants, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says.

"As far as I am concerned, there is no violation. Why is there (violation) when we are sending them back? We cannot be supporting them," he told newsmen after launching the North Pole Freefall Expedition in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on a foreign news report claiming that a high-ranking Indonesian official had described the death of eight Indonesian illegal immigrants during the Semenyih detention camp riot last Thursday as a violation of human rights.

The Prime Minister said he was unaware of such a report, adding that Indonesian Vice-President Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, whom he met yesterday, did not raise any issue regarding the repatriation exercise.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, meanwhile, expressed regret over "negative" and "baseless" foreign reports on the incident.

Abdullah said some of the reports violate the principle of conventional press freedom.

"This is not press freedom... it is not that we cannot accept criticism, but their reports must be accurate," he told reporters after opening the Gombak Umno divisional meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

Abdullah also said the Government will not hand over the detention camps to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNCHR).

"They are not refugees but people who seek to work (in the country) illegally."

He was commenting on a statement by Human Rights Watch's director for Asia, Mr Mike Jendrzejezyk, who urged Malaysia to cease the repatriation exercise and hand the detention camps over to the UNCHR.

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