

Filipinos who flee to Malaysia are 'war refugees'

BT 22 SEP 2000

FILIPINOS who flee to Malaysia to escape military attacks in the southern part of that country will be treated as war refugees, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said Malaysia cannot accept them as illegal immigrants but as war refugees.

"If they come, we will treat them like we treated the Vietnamese (refugees) before.

"They will be placed at a special area and will not be allowed to leave the place except if they are willing to return home," he told a news conference after opening the

International Media Convention on the Role of the Media in Non-Aligned Countries in Shah Alam yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the possibility of Filipinos seeking refuge in Malaysia to escape the military attacks on the Abu Sayyaf rebels' strongholds on Jolo island in the southern Philippines. The Philippine military launched the attacks last Saturday in efforts to free 22 hostages, including three Malaysians, who were reported to be held captive in Jolo Island. -- *By HAMISAH HAMID*