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Mahathir-Philippines

FILIPINO IMMIGRANTS WILL GO BACK IF PEACE RESTORED, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 15 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he is confident that the Filipino immigrants in the country will return home if peace is restored in the southern Philippines.

"We are asking the Filipinos to go back. But the Philippines has not made preparations for their return. If the situation in southern Philippines is peaceful, I believe everybody will go back," he told reporters after launching the "New Millennium Tree Planting" event and opening the Bukit Jalil Park, here.

He was asked on news reports that the Philippine armed forces had confiscated a "Malaysian" passport said to belong to a leader of the Abu Sayyaf.

Commenting further, Dr Mahathir said that the person concerned might have stayed in Sabah previously.

"He may have stayed in Sabah previously...he's got a passport. Now he has become an Abu Sayyaf leader, we do don't know. If he wants to join the Abu Sayyaf, we have no control. We cannot determine who is going to become criminals," he said.

Some 200,000 illegal Filipino immigrants are believed to be in Sabah.

The southern Philippines has been deep in political turmoil including clashes between the armed forces and the separatists.

The situation became tense following the continuous military operations against the Abu Sayyaf.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on foreign criticisms of the country's environmental management.

"We now no longer bother about them. Foreign reports about Malaysia, we have dismissed completely," he said.

In fact, Dr Mahathir said, foreigners had told him that they no longer rely on the Western media.

"Even foreigners tell me they don't rely on foreign newspapers, they don't rely on western newspapers. Those foreigners who wish to invest here, they will know the situation here is different from the foreign media reports," he said.

The prime minister said that foreign tourists were also aware of the negative propaganda of the foreign media and never give much weight to such reports.

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