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Indon authorities get cracking

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LANGKAWI, Wed. - Indonesian authorities have started planning ways to take back hundreds of thousands of Indonesian illegal immigrants working and staying in Malaysia.

Indonesian Ambassador to Malaysia, Hadi A. Wayarabi Alhadar, said a meeting was held recently in Pekan Baru, Riau, to work things out.

"There is already a commitment back home to overcome this problem and it is a matter of time before it is implemented," he said after seeing off Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid at the Langkawi International Airport today.

Abdurrahman had arrived yesterday for an overnight working visit to Malaysia.

The meeting in Pekan Baru was chaired by Home Affairs and Regional Autonomy Minister Suriadi and attended by Labour and Transmigration Minister Alhilal Hamdi and the respective Governors.

Wayarabi said both Indonesian and Malaysian authorities had experience in deporting illegal Indonesian immigrants.

Two years ago Indonesia sent its warships to take back its citizens, with the cost borne by both countries.

"There is an understanding on this between the two countries."

Malaysia and Indonesia yesterday agreed that Indonesian illegal immigrants in Malaysia would be deported and the cost to be borne by both Governments.

After a two-hour meeting with Abdurraman, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Indonesia acknowledged the problems faced by Malaysia in dealing with the illegal immigrants.

Meanwhile, Immigration director-general Datuk Aseh Che Mat said the deportation process would ensure those deported reach their homes safely.

"We received information that in the past some of those deported did not reach home and returned (to Malaysia)."

He added that there were also those who were made to believe they could return to Malaysia and jobs were waiting for them.

He said the department would ask the Indonesian Government to send its navy ships here to ferry their compatriots working illegally in Malaysia back.

He added that the number of Indonesians who had entered the country illegally so far this year stood at about 65,000.

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