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Mahathir-Haj

MAHATHIR SLANDERED ON MALAYSIANS' ARRESTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

KUALA LUMPUR, March 20 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said there was slander being spread against him in Kelantan that he asked the Saudi Arabian government to arrest Malaysians who used the umrah visa to perform the haj.

"Actually they were there without the haj visa, and this was against the laws of Saudi Arabia," the Prime Minister told reporters after chairing the Umno Supreme Council meeting here today.

He said the Saudi government had not acted against such offenders previously but decided to take action this time around because the number of people using the umrah visa had increased.

"According to information from our consul in Jeddah, our people who were arrested there were in pitiful conditions. Realising this, the government has decided to bring back those who were in jail," said Dr Mahathir who told the Supreme Council about the slander against him.

Dr Mahathir said the government was prepared to spend money to bring them back and free them from detention in Saudi Arabia.

"We are doing this (bring them back) because of our sense of responsibility for our people who have been hit by misfortune. But there are quarters in Kelantan and other places who accuse me of giving the order to arrest them.

"This is what happens when people use slander to get support. They will forever resort to slandering," Dr Mahathir said.

The Umno president said he was not going to take any action on the slander.

"I don't want to do anything. I leave it to God. When we help people...this is the result," he said.

Last Feb 11, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman was quoted as saying that the government estimated that some 3,000 Malaysians still in Saudi Arabia had overstayed their umrah visas.

-- BERNAMA

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