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`Malaysia practices open-door policy'

Kamarul Yunus

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday said Malaysia will welcome anyone into the country so long as they have good intentions.

"Malaysia has always practised an open door policy for anyone who wants to visit this country, as long as it is with good intentions," he told newsmen after attending the 2000 Thomas/Uber Cup Run in Kuala Lumpur.

He was asked to comment on a news report from Ankara that Kussama Maskhadova, the wife of Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, and his 15-year-old daughter, Fatime, had left Istanbul yesterday for Malaysia.

The Chechen president was reported to be in hiding in south-eastern Chechnya. Russia considers Maskhadov a criminal and has opened criminal proceedings against him for leading the last seven months of armed rebellion in Chechnya.

Maskhadov's son, Anzor, who fought against Russia in the 1994-1996 Chechen war, is currently living in Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir said if people wanted to live in Malaysia because they could not do so in their own country, they were always welcome.

"This is a humanitarian move, no politics in it," he said.

For example, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia has opened its doors to the Bosnians and Kosovars who had problems in their countries.

"If they want to come, whether to seek asylum or continue with their lives as they cannot do that there (in their countries) and some children want to receive education here, we will accept them all.

"It is up to anybody to say whether it is considered as asylum but our policy is that we are open to anyone who faces such problems in their respective countries," he said.

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