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PM: Country practices open policy for those seeking to visit nation

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Malaysia practices an open policy for anyone wanting to visit the country, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

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

"If they want to come, whether to seek asylum or continue with their lives as they cannot do that in their countries, and their children want to seek education here, we will accept them all," he said after attending the Kuala Lumpur 2000 Thomas/Uber Cup Run at Dataran Merdeka.

Dr Mahathir said this when asked to comment on a news report from Ankara that the wife and daughter of beleaguered Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, who was hiding in southeastern Chechnya, had left Istanbul yesterday for Malaysia.

The Anatolia news agency yesterday reported that Kussama Maskhadova and 15-year old Fatima boarded a Malaysia Airlines plane bound for Kuala Lumpur.

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.

Dr Mahathir said the decision to accept Maskhadov's family was based on humanitarian grounds, adding that no politics was involved.

Giving examples, he said Malaysia had opened its doors to the Bosnians and Kosovars displaced by ethnic problems in their countries.

Meanwhile, Kazbek Khadzhiev, who is the chief representative officer of the Chechen Republic in Malaysia, confirmed that Kussama and Fatima had arrived in Kuala Lumpur early this morning.

However, he denied that they had fled from Ingushetia in Chechnya where they were staying.

"Kussama is here to visit her son Anzor who is living in Malaysia. They have not met each other for a long time. They will be here for a week and are expected to return to Chechnya after that," he said.

Bernama quoted Anzor as saying today that his mother is staying with him. Anzor said his mother flew in from Istanbul with his 15-year-old sister, Fatima, and they are staying at his apartment.

"The visit has got nothing to do with politics," he said when contacted by Bernama here.

Kussama, 50, and Fatima would be here for two to three weeks before returning home, Anzor said.

"She (Kussama) came here to see my children and myself. My mother and sister will go back (home) after the visit," he said.

He said Kussama and Fatima left Ingushetia for Georgia before arriving in Turkey.

The Anatolia News Agency yesterday reported from Ankara that the mother and her daughter were driven to the airport's apron in a special vehicle under heavy security shortly before the plane took off. Journalists were not allowed to take pictures.

The news agency said Kussama and Fatima arrived in Istanbul from the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, on Thursday.

Anzor said his mother still lives in Chechnya "but sometimes had to move around due to the difficult circumstances there".

Asked about the fate of his father, he said the Chechen President was "fine now".

"He will never leave his country and let his people struggle against the Russian forces alone. He is never going to leave Chechnya because the Russians are killing the people everyday," Anzor said.

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