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`Government to probe threat to consulate in Pontianak'

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KOTA BARU, Fri. - The Government will investigate the threat to the Malaysian consulate in Pontianak, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said family members of the staff at the consulate had to be brought home after their safety was threatened.

He said the Indonesian Government should offer protection to consulate staff and their families.

"They are our diplomatic representatives and their position must be respected.

"But we want to know what actually happened. If we take action against a foreign national in our country, are we doing a wrong thing?

"And if they want to take revenge against our citizens for the action against their nationals, then this simply means we cannot accept any foreigners in our country," he added.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the decision to evacuate a member of the staff and 12 family members yesterday following fears of unrest over alleged ill-treatment of an Indonesian in Sarawak.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the Indonesian Foreign Ministry had given an assurance on the safety of staff at the consulate.

Speaking after presenting a contribution to Persatuan Kebajikan Titian Firdaus at his office, he said the consulate was still in operation.

He said several officers had remained behind despite the evacuation which was carried out on the advice from security authorities in West Kalimantan.

"They will monitor the development and will not act hastily until we know the actual situation.

"What we are doing are preventive measures and we are taking precautionary action by looking at the background of several incidents that have taken place recently."

He advised the public not to go to places where there were reports of unrest.

Syed Hamid said there were no plans to evacuate family members of officers working at the consulate in Medan.

He added Malaysia had always considered Indonesia as an important Asean member and gave priority to bilateral relationship.

"We don't want to do anything that will jeopardise the good bilateral relations between the two countries but at the same time, we have to take measures to protect our citizens and our foreign missions."

In Hulu Terengganu, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the Government might send troop reinforcements to the Sarawak-Kalimantan border if the situation warranted it.

"If the situation at the troubled spot becomes more serious, we may send additional soldiers to the border.

"For the time being, there is no need to send our soldiers to the border but they have been asked to be on alert," he said after opening the Hulu Terengganu Umno divisional meeting at Sekolah Menengah Seri Berang today.

He said security forces had been put on alert following the evacuation of consulate staff and family members from the consulate.

In Kuching, Acting Commissioner of Police Senior Assistant Commissioner Yusoff Nook advised Malaysians not to travel to Kalimantan following fears of unrest in Pontianak.

He said more men would be deployed at the border town of Tebedu to monitor the situation.

Meanwhile, the officer-in-charge of the Immigration post in Tebedu, Ahmadi Ibrahim, said Malaysian Consul in Pontianak, Ismail Salam, had instructed the Immigration Department to advise locals not to travel to Pontianak.

Besides advising the public verbally, immigration staff have also put up a notice advising people against crossing the border.

Ahmadi said local bus operators had been given similar advice.