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Khalil: No discrimination against foreigners

Firdaus Abdullah in Durban

XENOPHOBIA, or hatred against foreigners, is something which is not the norm in Malaysia.

The Government has never practised or encouraged discrimination against foreigners residing, studying or working in the country because it believes in sharing opportunities and knowledge.

Malaysian delegation head to the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR), Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said today that, infact, the the multi-ethnic coalition-led Government welcomes foreigners to Malaysia.

"We encourage our people to have greater interaction with foreigners, particularly with those from developing nations so that we can complement each other in the face of globalisation.

"Our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was also instrumental in establishing South-South co-operation, with particular focus on African nations so that we can move ahead together," the Minister of Information said.

Speaking after an interview with the South Africa Broadcast Corporation television network today, Khalil said xenophobia was foreign to Malaysia as there are millions of foreigners who are legally employed and live along side the locals without much problems.

He said the notion that Malaysia discriminated against foreigners based on their skin colour is not true as the enforcement authorities only acted upon those who commit crime.

"It is not something that is targeted at any race or nationality ... if you commit a crime, even if you are a local Malay, Indian or Chinese, action will be taken.

"We should not relate action against criminals to racism because they are poles apart," he explained.

During his interview with the SABC Television, the Minister was asked if Malaysia practised some form of discrimination against those from African nations.

Obviously referring to the arrest and prosecution of several African nationals who were found to be involved in the "black money" scam in Kuala Lumpur and Penang recently, the SABC journalist asked Khalil categorically if those from Africans were discriminated because they were black.

"That is not true, we have never practised that, ... we don't practise or encourage such an attitude among Malaysians, infact we're trying to enhance our relationship with Africa and its people so that we can share resources and grow together ... we believe in human development," Khalil explained.

He later told another group of journalist that if Malaysia actually discriminated against those from Africa, there won't be any Government-sponsored African students in Malaysian universities.

The International Islamic University for example, he said, had many students from Africa who are pursuing their tertiary education without much problems.

"Some of them are even working on part-time basis," Khalil explained.

Earlier Khalil, Malaysian High Commissioner to South Africa Datuk Zainal Azman Zainal Abidin and Malaysian Counsellor Md Yusof Pardi toured the SABC broadcast village at the Durban Exhibition Centre where the WCAR media centre is located.

They were briefed and accompanied by SABC news executive editor, Snuki

Zikalala, who explained their entire operations during the one-hour visit, which ended with a studio interview.

On the issue of reparation for slavery, Khalil explained to the Radio France Internationale (RFI) that Malaysia was of the view that some form of positive initiative needs to be taken.

To another question from the RFI, Khalil dismissed allegations that in Malaysia, the minority groups were being discriminated in terms of education.

"I think you're misinformed, it is not as negative as the Western media reports, we have been multi-racial from all angles. We also allow private universities whereby the majority of students there are non-natives (non-Bumis).

"There is actually a very good balance.

"We agree that there is a certain leverage for the Bumiputeras but if you study the overall picture, there is a very good balance," he said, adding that the Government was also constantly striving to make higher education affordable to all.

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