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Workers

AMBASSADOR DEFENDS MALAYSIA'S STANCE ON INDON WORKERS' ISSUE

JAKARTA, Feb 12 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's ambassador to Indonesia, Datuk Rastam Mohamed Isa has defended Malaysia's stance on the "hire Indonesian workers last" policy, saying it is not about discrimination against the workers.

"To us...what is valid is that on Jan 17, a riot occurred, which was instigated mostly by Indonesian workers which got grossly out of hand," Rastam told Indonesian reporters meeting him at the Malaysian embassy here yesterday as quoted by "The Jakarta Post."

On that date, about 500 Indonesians working at a textile factory in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, went on a violent riot as a protest against the police who were about to detain 16 of their colleagues for suspected drug abuse.

Rastam said that the incident was shocking to Malaysians who had never conducted themselves in that manner.

The government, in its final review on the issue that included returning half of the more than 566,000 Indonesian workers in Malaysia, only agreed to accept Indonesian working in plantations and as maids.

The ambassador said that he had no wish to comment on the high rate of crimes, "gross violations committed by Indonesians" in Malaysia which reportedly included violent thefts, rapes, murders and extortion.

"It is not because Malaysia finds Indonesian workers particularly frightening or a threat to Malaysia...our government believes that more job opportunities should be given to more deserving Malaysians," he said.

Rastam said that under the new labour policy on reducing foreign workers in Malaysia, Indonesian workers, except those who were working in plantations and as maids, would be replaced by workers from other countries.

Malaysia's move on the Indonesian workers has caused a stir in this archipelago republic, as it will give further pressure on its unemployment problem which is rated at almost 40 million last year.

Studies have projected that about 50 million people will be without jobs this year as the country still fails to lift itself from the abyss of economic malaise it suffered since mid-1997.

Several labour bodies and activists called on President Megawati Sukarnoputri, who has been silent on the issue, to meet Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to discuss the matter.

-- BERNAMA

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