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So sorry, says Indonesia (HL)

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Indonesia has apologised to Malaysia for last week's riots by 500 Indonesian workers at a textile factory in Negri Sembilan, a newspaper report said.

According to a Bernama report from Jakarta, Manpower and Transmigration Minister Jacob Nuwa Wea who extended the apology, said the Indonesian Government regretted the incident.

There was no confirmation whether an official apology had been sent to Malaysia but Nuwa Wea's statement on the matter was carried by the English-language daily The Jakarta Post.

In the incident in Nilai, rampaging Indonesian workers overturned police vehicles, ransacked facilities at their hostel and jeered at security personnel in protest over the arrest of 16 of their colleagues for alleged drug abuse.

The Malaysian police had since arrested 30 workers involved in the incident for investigation.

The newspaper quoted Nuwa Wea as saying that the Indonesian Government would not protect the workers by interfering in the investigation.

"Malaysia has its own laws, our government cannot interfere with the Malaysian authorities investigating into all aspects of the incident," he said.

However, he hoped the incident would not create a negative impact on other Indonesian workers in Malaysia or affect good relations between the two countries.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir had said that following the incident, Malaysia would put Indonesia last on the list when recruiting foreign workers.

Yesterday, the Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda appealed to Malaysia not to make a judgment on Indonesian workers based on the incident.

Malaysia is already hosting 700,000 Indonesian workers who could not seek employment at home besides several thousands more who had entered the country illegally.

On Jan 18, 450 workers of a textile factory in Nilai rioted, attacking policemen and destroying vehicles after 16 of their colleagues were detained by police when they tested positive for drugs.

Last month, 1,600 illegal workers at a holding camp in Pekan Nanas, Johor, rioted and torched a section of their quarters.

Yesterday, 66 Indonesians were believed to have torched five stalls and threatened stallholders with parangs in Cyberjaya.

In Bangi, Ramlan Said reports that more stringent checks will be carried out before approval is given to applications for permanent resident status.

Dr Mahathir said the move was necessary to ensure that those given the privilege were law-abiding.

He said the Government, alarmed over the recent spate of rioting and disturbances involving Indonesian workers in the country, felt stricter measures needed to be introduced to tackle the problems involving foreign workers.

Speaking after opening Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's career day, Dr Mahathir said he was informed that a member of the Kumpulan Militan Malaysia now being sought by police was a PR.

On the measures to be taken, the Prime Minister said patrols along the country's shores would be intensified to prevent illegal entries while there would be no let-up in deporting the illegals.

The number of those employed legally would also be reduced.

"We can no longer view this matter lightly and a rethink (of policies) is needed due to recent events.

"I think their number is too large ... if there is an uprising, we will be in trouble."

Dr Mahathir said this when asked to comment on yesterday's incident in Cyberjaya.

He said even Putrajaya, the Federal Government administrative centre, was not spared of illegals.

He related an incident one day while driving with his police escort in Putrajaya. "The moment they saw the police car, they bolted into nearby bushes. Even some of the workers in Putrajaya are illegals."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would not tolerate foreign workers who took the law into their own hands.

"We figure they would be grateful but it looks like they want to have their own laws.

"Our own people respect the laws, we cannot tolerate foreigners who refuse to abide by our laws."

In Kuala Terengganu, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the Government would study whether the existing laws were sufficient to take action against foreign workers who were involved in riots.

Abdullah said the study would also explore possibilities for new provisions to take immediate action against those concerned.

"This is a serious issue and Indonesian workers should not be rioting in our country as they are jeopardising the safety of the locals.

"We would not hesitate to take stern action against those involved and the culprits to be brought to the courts. The police would also beef up security at all places to ensure such incidents do not occur again."

Abdullah, who is also the Home Minister, said he had instructed the Inspector General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai to take immediate action against those involved in the recent riots.

He said the matter was expected to be discussed during the weekly Cabinet and the Committee on Foreign Workers meetings tomorrow.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein has called on the Government to find ways to reduce the number of legal and illegal Indonesian immigrants entering the country.

"We should find ways to limit their numbers."

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