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Dr Mahathir: Jakarta is not involved (HL)

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PENANG, Tues. - Malaysia will not seek an explanation from the Indonesian Government or send a strong protest over the burning of a replica of the Jalur Gemilang by a small group of radical Indonesian nationalists, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Describing the incident as gampang (easy way out), the Prime Minister said it did not reflect the Indonesian Government's stand.

"The Indonesian population is more than 200 million and there is bound to be a small number of irresponsible people among them.

"We cannot respond to the action (of burning the Malaysian flag) since it is not reflective of the Indonesian Government's stand.

"It was not done by the Indonesian Government but by an extremist group.

"We view the action as gampang and will not protest or seek an explanation," he said after attending a luncheon to honour eight pioneer multinational companies and 12 small and medium-scale industries.

The Indonesians who burnt the replica of the Jalur Gemilang in Jakarta yesterday had claimed that Malaysia meted out harsh punishments to illegal immigrants from the republic.

The Indonesians were members of a group named after the republic's flag, Sang Saka Merah Putih.

Asked for his advice to Malaysians who wished to visit Indonesia in light of current developments, he said: "At the moment, there is no need to go there."

Dr Mahathir also said the Government would revoke the permanent resident status of any person found guilty of committing serious crimes.

In Putrajaya, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the Indonesian Government should ensure Malaysians in the republic were not exposed to any security threat.

He also said the burning of the Malaysian flag should not happen again.

"We hope the Indonesian Government can take measures to remedy the situation. Don't let the people worsen the situation (between the two countries)," he was quoted as saying by Bernama.

He said burning the flag was not the way to conduct international relations.

"We should not be guided by emotions in dealing with international relations.

"In this matter, the (Indonesian) media and the leaders should play an important role by not taking an anti-Malaysia stand," he said after receiving five US congressional staffers at his office.

He said while some Indonesians were angered by the Malaysian Government's decision to jail and whip illegal immigrants, they should not forget that there were still many Indonesians working here, earning a living and sending money home.

The law, he said, was meant to stem the inflow of illegal immigrants, and the punishment applied to those workers from other countries as well.

Following the flag-burning incident, Syed Hamid yesterday advised Malaysians to put off any visit to Indonesia.

He said Malaysia would ask Indonesia to explain the incident through diplomatic channels.

"Let me make this clear. We are not saying Malaysians are banned from going to Indonesia, but go there only if you have important things to do. I think in this kind of situation, there will be people taking the law

into their own hands. They have to think about Indonesians working here as well," he said.

Syed Hamid said Wisma Putra was monitoring the situation in Indonesia but hoped that the Asean partner would take immediate measures to stop the radical group from jeopardising bilateral ties.

Meanwhile, Bernama reported from Jakarta that Indonesia reacted with displeasure at Kuala Lumpur for issuing a travel advisory calling on Malaysians to avoid visiting the republic.

Indonesian Foreign Ministry spokesman Marty Natalegawa said the advisory was unwarranted and not based on the actual situation in Indonesia.

"The fact is, Malaysians in Indonesia are secure and comfortable. They are not being threatened or harassed," he was quoted by the Indonesian national news agency, Antara, as saying.

But a AP report, from Jakarta, said the Speaker of Indonesia's top legislative assembly welcomed the travel advisory.

Speaker Amien Rais said Malaysia's travel advisory was "a good thing".