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Mahathir-Indonesia

KL-JAKARTA TIES UNAFFECTED BY ACTION AGAINST RIOTERS, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 24 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is convinced that Malaysia's action against trouble-making Indonesian workers in the country will not jeopardise good relations between Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta.

He said certain groups in Indonesia would indeed want to see souring of Malaysia-Indonesia ties by hurling allegations, including baseless ones, prompted by police action against Indonesian workers.

"There are certain factions in Indonesia which resent Malaysia and Indonesia having good ties.

"I am confident that we can handle this, we have good relations with the Indonesian government," he said at a news conference after chairing an Umno Supreme Council meeting at the party headquarters at the Datuk Onn Tower of the Putra World Trade Center here today.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on allegations by a Jakarta-based lobby group that mistreatment and abuse by the Malaysian police of Indonesian workers had caused them to riot.

This month alone saw two incidents of rioting by Indonesia workers in Malaysia namely the one staged by 500 of them at a textile factory in Nilai on Jan 17 and the second, five days later involving rival Indonesian groups from Aceh in Dengkil.

In the Jan 17 incident, the workers destroyed police vehicles and other property in protest over detention of 16 of their colleagues who had tested positive for drug.

Following the incidents, Malaysia decided to place Indonesia as the last option when recruiting foreign workers.

Dr Mahathir said groups accusing the Malaysian police of mistreatment and abuse of Indonesian workers should substantiate their allegations.

Dr Mahathir said: "Looking at and comparing pictures of police brutality there, they seem to show that it is more brutal over there."

He also explained that following the latest policy change the government has decided to take in Indonesian workers, including housemaids, only as a last option with the exception of specific circumstances.

Otherwise, Malaysia would stick to sourcing immigrant labour from other countries first, he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government's latest decision should not strain ties between Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta since it was the Indonesian workers themselves who rioted in Malaysia.

"It is their own action that creates in the Malaysian government and the Malaysian people an aversion towards Indonesian immigrants. They are the ones souring the ties, not us," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that in fact Indonesian immigrants were responsible for a host of criminals acts in Malaysia but the government had then chosen to keep quiet.

"If we total up the number of criminal acts committed by Indonesian immigrants and compare it with the overall crime figures, we find that the number committed by them is substantial and the crimes committed are violent ones including armed robberies," he said.

Even so, Malaysia had chosen not to be vocal about the menace posed by Indonesian immigrants, he said.

However, it could no longer keep quiet when their groups started rioting one after another, he said.

"On numerous occasions we have accorded them preferential treatment. Now we no longer want to keep them, Those coming in illegally will be deported immediately," he said.

Dr Mahathir added that today's Umno Supreme Council meeting discussed the menace posed by Indonesian workers in the country and expressed support for the government's handling of it.

-- BERNAMA

AFY AHH RYN