

25/01/2002

PM: Decision to hire Indon workers as last resort will not sour ties

Ramlan Said; Ainon Mohd

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The decision to hire Indonesian workers as a last resort will not sour ties with the republic, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said he was also confident that action taken against Indonesian workers who rioted last week would not jeopardise good relations between the two countries.

If there was anyone to blame for causing a strain in relations, he said, it was the workers from the republic who created problems, including rioting and causing damage to property.

"When things like this happen, it causes unhappiness to the Government and the public. It is their action that is causing a strain in ties, not us," he said after chairing an Umno supreme council meeting at Menara Dato' Onn.

Dr Mahathir, who is party president, said the supreme council supported the decision taken by the Government on the "last resort" policy, which also affected the hiring of maids.

However, he said in certain cases, applications to bring in Indonesian workers could still be made.

Asked whether he had any plans to meet Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri over the matter, the Prime Minister replied in the negative.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia and Indonesia enjoyed good relations but there were quarters in Indonesia who were unhappy about this.

He said this when asked to comment on a claim by a Jakarta-based lobby group that the rioting in Nilai last week where 500 Indonesian workers at a textile factory went on a rampage was triggered by police brutality and mistreatment.

"Please show the proof," he said, expressing regret that such claims were being made before the truth was ascertained.

"This is an attempt to sour ties between two countries. There are quarters in Indonesia who are unhappy with our good relations," he added. On the contention by an Indonesian junior minister that disturbances caused by their nationals here were only isolated, the Prime Minister said there had been many cases but the Government had been keeping quiet.

"They have committed many crimes, including serious ones like armed robberies, and if we compare the figures to their population here, it is quite high.

"With the recent spate of rioting and disturbances, we can no longer keep quiet," he said, adding that Indonesians employed in the country had been treated well.

To a suggestion that local employers preferred to hire Indonesians because they could be paid low wages and not because the locals were not interested, Dr Mahathir said:

"They (Indonesians) are willing to work late into the night. Pay them overtime and they are prepared to work. Just check the construction sites at night and you will see the people who are working," he said, adding that many Malaysians were not willing to work in certain sectors.

The Prime Minister was also asked about areas in the city like Chow Kit and Kampung Datuk Keramat which have been dominated by Indonesians and whether the authorities were planning any operation to clean up the areas.

"Yes, we will do it but the problem is that locals have been selling their trading lots and licences to these people. How can they dominate

these areas in the first place? If they occupied using force, surely the locals will raise the matter with the authorities. It is the locals who sell."

news@nstp.com.my

(END)