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Abdullah-Africa

MANY AFRICAN ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS ENTER MALAYSIA THROUGH THAILAND

KEPALA BATAS, Feb 2 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today operations at the Malaysia-Thailand border will be stepped up because many African illegal immigrants enter Malaysia through Thailand.

"I find that many illegal immigrants come through the Malaysia-Thai border...as such, the government will step up operations in this area to reduce the number of illegal immigrants, especially those from the African nations.

"This is important because all this while (the government) had focused on operations in Sabah and Melaka (waters).

"What's happening is that many enter from Thailand," Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, told a media conference after chairing the Kepala Batas Umno division committee meeting, here.

He was asked to comment on the manhunt for a group of African illegal immigrants who escaped while being ferried from Kuala Lumpur to the Kemayan detention camp in Pahang yesterday.

He said 132 of the Africans had been recaptured while 21 were still at large.

Abdullah said Malaysia did not stop Africans from coming to Malaysia to invest, do business or visit as this was in line with the government's policy to have good relations and cooperation with other countries in the world, including the African nations.

However, problems arose when many immigrants, including those from the African countries, entered the country illegally.

He said they smuggled themselves into the country through the Malaysia-Thailand border and also from the south (of the peninsula) and Sabah.

He said the tightening of security at the borders was not meant to make it difficult for citizens of friendly nations to come to Malaysia.

He also said that those who entered illegally would be deported.

However, he said, deporting African illegal immigrants took a long time because the countries concerned refused to accept them as they did not documents to prove their country of origin.

He said the Foreign Ministry would seek discussions with the African countries to resolve the problem.

Most of the Africans detained in the operation in Kuala Lumpur yesterday were believed to be from Liberia, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Abdullah said Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai briefed him and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on the escape yesterday.

He said police would tighten the procedure for transporting large numbers of detainees to detention camps to prevent a recurrence of such incident.

The measures included using the services of the Federal Reserve Unit instead of the police to escort detainees, he said.

Meanwhile, in ALOR SETAR, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Chor Chee Heung said that if investigations showed that the escape was due to police negligence, disciplinary action could be taken against the personnel involved.

Speaking to reporters after visiting the Pekan Cina market, he said the government took a serious view of the matter because incidents of

foreigners making trouble for the authorities had become rampant.

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