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Indon-Bomer

MEGAWATI TOLD TO DISCUSS WORKERS ISSUE WITH DR MAHATHIR

JAKARTA, Feb 7 (Bernama) -- President Megawati Sukarnoputri should discuss with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad Malaysia's plan to halve the number of Indonesian workers in that country.

She should also take up with the Prime Minister, Malaysia's introduction of a "hire Indonesian last" policy, a former Manpower Minister Bomer Pasaribu has suggested.

Bomer, who is also the Director of the Centre for Labour and Development Studies, said that Indonesia needed to make extra efforts to prevent the straining of bilateral ties between Indonesia and Malaysia, a country that had offered many job opportunities to Indonesian workers.

"Megawati should address the matter personally with Dr Mahathir because the jobs of hundreds of thousands of Indonesian workers are at stake...what will their families eat, when they come back to Indonesia without a job?," Bomer was quoted as saying by the English daily "The Jakarta Post".

He said sending ministers to Malaysia to deal with this messy issue was not going to bring about any change.

Dr Mahathir himself had been making the policies and this issue needed to be dealt with at national level or Indonesia risked worsening its ties with Malaysia, he said.

Indonesian workers had been involved in a series of incidents with the latest being a rampage at a textile factory in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, on Jan 17, and three days later fighting broke out among themselves at Cyberjaya near Kuala Lumpur.

In the latest development over the issue, Malaysia had decided to retain only those hired as maids and plantation workers.

Megawati sent Justice and Human Rights Minister, Yusril Ihza Mahendra last week to Kuala Lumpur as her emissary to meet Dr Mahathir to discuss the matter.

Bomer admitted that the sensitive migrant workers issue would be an extremely tough job to try and "smooth over" at this point.

"Megawati is the President...as the nation's leader, she should at least try to speak with Dr Mahathir," Bomer said.

Till now Megawati, true to her taciturn character had not made any statement on the issue much to the chagrin of a large section of Indonesian society facing massive unemployment problems as a result of the current economic crisis.

--BERNAMA

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