

09/10/2002

Malaysia will not impose visa restrictions on visitors, says Dr M

Ramlan Said; Kamarul Yunus

PETALING JAYA, Tues. - Malaysia will not impose visa restrictions on visitors as such a move will only inconvenience them, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"We are not going to do it as we think it is silly and ineffective," he said when asked whether Malaysia would tighten visa procedures after Saudi Arabia announced it might fingerprint Americans as part of the entry process.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after opening the Malaysia-China Economic Conference at a hotel.

"It is a nuisance and we do not want to be a nuisance to people who want to come to Malaysia. We welcome people to Malaysia."

The Saudi move is seen as a reaction to the new American entry and exit legislation subjecting visitors to increased scrutiny through fingerprinting, photographs and registration.

Earlier, one participant mentioned to Dr Mahathir the difficulties faced by Malaysian businessmen who had to apply for Chinese visas.

The Prime Minister said he would address the matter with the Chinese Government, including the possibility of granting multiple entry visas to Malaysians.

"The decision is with them and not me, but we can talk to them," he added.

To another question, Dr Mahathir agreed that it would be beneficial for businessmen to familiarise themselves with business policies and regulations in China as they might differ among the provinces, cities and central Government.

On whether Malaysia's Look East policy should now include China instead of just Japan and South Korea, Dr Mahathir quipped:

"When the policy was first introduced, we did not say 'Look Japan', but 'Look East', so China is included as it is in the east.

"But at that time, nothing much could be learnt from China because of its closed-door policy.

"Now we are able to learn from China as it is no longer like that."

A participant asked about the East Asian Economic Caucus, and the Prime Minister said some countries opposed the idea when it was first mooted on the basis that groupings or blocs should not be established.

"But now we have established Asean+3 which basically has the same composition as the EAEC."