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Mahathir-Illegals

M'SIA TRYING TO DEFUSE ILLEGAL WORKERS ISSUE

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 30 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Malaysia is trying its best to defuse the illegal workers issue in a rational way.

"I am trying to defuse this in a very rational way. If (they claim that) we mistreat them, let them come and see," he told reporters after chairing the Umno Supreme Council meeting at the party headquarters here.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on claims by the Philippines and Indonesia that Malaysia had mistreated illegal workers from those countries when they were detained at holding camps.

Malaysia had embarked on a deportation exercise involving hundreds of thousands of illegal workers during an amnesty period which ended on July 31 this year.

Since then, amended immigration laws providing for caning and jailing of illegal immigrants have come into effect.

Asked on the burning of the Jalur Gemilang by Philippine and Indonesian protesters in front of the Malaysian embassy in Manila and Jakarta respectively, Dr Mahathir said their actions did not reflect the stands of their governments.

Dr Mahathir said immigrant workers had never raised the issue of being mistreated when they were working illegally in the country.

"They stayed here for years, used our hospital facilities. (They) never said they were mistreated," he said.

The prime minister was also asked to comment on a report in "The Washington Post" today which said Malaysia was among countries where the Al-Qaeda group might have maintained financial accounts.

"As far as we know, there is none," he said, adding that Malaysia had given an undertaking to cooperate with other authorities to investigate the possible existence of such accounts.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on the proposal to teach Science and Mathematics in English in primary schools next year.

"No change (in the government's decision) to use English to teach Science and Maths in primary one next year, but we will listen to their views," he said.

-- BERNAMA

AT MAM YBY