

23 JAN 2002

Indon-Workers

THROW OUT BAD ONES, ACCEPT THE REST, SAYS INDON MINISTER

JAKARTA, Jan 23 (Bernama) -- Indonesia today appealed to irate Malaysia not to send back thousands of its workers except those who had created trouble in the country.

Manpower and Transmigration Minister Jacob Nuwa Wea, who made the appeal, however expressed reservations that Malaysia would impose a total ban on Indonesian workers.

"I'm confident Malaysia still need Indonesian workers. I don't think Malaysia will abandon us," he told reporters after a cabinet meeting here.

He was asked to comment on Malaysia's move to review recruitment of foreign workers and give priority to those from countries other than Indonesia.

The move came in the wake of a violent riot by a group of about 500 Indonesian workers at a textile factory in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan last Thursday after police tried to detain 16 of their colleagues for drug abuse.

A total of 125 of them have been arrested in connection with the rampage in which they overturned police vehicles, ransacked facilities at their hostel and jeered at security personnel.

Just three days after the riot, about 70 Indonesian construction workers armed with machetes went on another rampage and damaged foodstalls run by fellow Indonesians in Dengkil, near Putrajaya.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was outraged by their unruly behaviour, said foreigners who did not obey Malaysian laws would not be tolerated.

Jacob, who had two days ago apologised to the Malaysian government over the incident, said he understood Dr Mahathir's sentiment.

"There's a possibility that we will visit Malaysia to extend our formal apology. There's nothing wrong in asking for an apology but we still want a first-hand report from our official," he said.

Indonesians formed the biggest number of foreign workers numbering about 700,000 in the country.

-- BERNAMA

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