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Terror suspect deported to US (HL)

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - American terror suspect Ahmed Ibrahim Bilal, held in custody for five days, was handed over to US officials early today and deported.

A statement from the US embassy said: "Ahmed Ibrahim Bilal was turned over to US officials this morning by the Royal Malaysian Police and was promptly removed from the country to return to the United States.

"We are extremely grateful to the Government of Malaysia for their assistance."

Although Ahmed's immediate destination was not immediately known, wire services have reported that the US Justice Department has filed charges against him in Portland, Oregon, for conspiring to wage war against his country and supporting al-Qaeda.

It was learnt that Ahmed, 25, was accompanied by Federal Bureau of Investigation officers and they boarded a non-commercial flight in the early hours of this morning. Sources said a US Air Force transport aircraft was used.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, when asked by reporters, said Malaysia did not act in haste and was not pressured to deport him.

He said the Government's actions were based on law and not influenced by rumours or public opinion.

"We go according to the law. In this country, the rule of the law applies. If a person has no documents, he has to leave," he said in response to reporters' questions at a Press conference after opening a seminar on South Korea at the Sunway Convention Centre.

Dr Mahathir disagreed that the Government had been rushed into deporting the former International Islamic University student as it did not want to be seen as harbouring a terrorist.

"If the law says you cannot keep a person who has no documents, that's it," he said, adding that action taken against Ahmed was not because of the US' contention that he was a terrorist but because he was an illegal after his passport was revoked.

Asked if the US had used the "back door" to get Ahmed back by revoking his passport, Dr Mahathir reiterated the Government acted in accordance with the law.

Dr Mahathir dismissed the suggestion that Malaysia's image had been tarnished by the way it handled Ahmed's case.

On action against members of Jemaah Islamiah in Singapore and Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said the Government was duty-bound to act against those engaged in activities harmful to the country.

"We will act against these people. Similarly, Malaysians involved in such acts in other countries will be subject to their laws," he added.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and the police declined to comment on the deportation.

At the High Court today, Ahmed's lawyer, Darshan Singh, withdrew his habeas corpus application upon Ahmed's parents' instructions because "they did not have faith and confidence in this court".

The withdrawal was made via a faxed letter addressed to the High Court Senior Assistant Registrar from the legal firm of Darshan Singh & Co at 12.20pm.

Ahmed's application was scheduled for hearing at 2.30pm after being postponed yesterday to allow the Attorney-General's Chambers to file

documents and affidavits-in-reply.

Last Friday, four people were arrested in Oregon and Michigan on charges of conspiring to wage war on the US and for supporting al-Qaeda.

Two others, including Ahmed, were also charged and US authorities disclosed they were abroad. Those arrested were Jeffrey Leon Battle, Patrice Lumumba Ford, October Martinuque Lewis and Muhammad Ibrahim Bilal (Ahmed's brother).

The sixth individual sought was identified as Abdullah al Saoub, who is believed to be outside the US.