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'Malaysia is not anti-Indonesia'

PANGKOR, Sun. - Malaysia is repatriating illegal workers, including Indonesians, because it has to protect the security of its own people and the local workforce, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said Malaysia was not anti-Indonesia in any way, even if its flag was burnt by Indonesians recently outside its embassy in Jakarta in protest of the repatriation exercise.

"We can't respond to such things," he said in reply to a question at the Pangkor Retreat dialogue, on the mass deportation of Indonesian workers.

He said the country needed the workers but wanted them to enter the country legally and with proper documents.

He said this was because many illegals could not find jobs and had turned to crime.

He added it was not only the Indonesians who were deported but also the Bangladeshis, Filipinos and other nationalities. Dr Mahathir said the Government realised that the construction industry hired many illegal workers and ran into problems when they were sent home.

However, the companies had to make the effort to hire only legal workers.

He said this problem was the result of two neighbours being at different levels of development.

Since the amnesty ended on July 31, and new immigration laws came into force, many illegals had been sentenced to jail and rotan, before being deported.

This had caused a public outcry in Indonesia and the Philippines, who claim that their nationals were being mistreated.