

29 AUG 2002

Syed Hamid-Illegals

M'SIA READY TO PROBE ANY REPORT OF ILL-TREATMENT OF ILLEGALS

PUTRAJAYA, Aug 29 (Bernama) -- Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar today advised those with specific complaints about the treatment of illegal immigrants by Malaysia to register them through the proper channel, pledging that the government will get to the bottom of it.

"If there are any incidents that they are not satisfied with, the best way for them is to bring them up through the diplomatic channel and we will investigate," he told reporters after receiving a visit by members of the Constitution Council of Cambodia here today.

However, Syed Hamid said so far he had not received any complaint of ill-treatment of illegal immigrants who were being deported back to their countries comprising mostly Indonesians and Filipinos as well as Bangladeshis, Indians and Myanmar nationals.

He was responding to queries over reports which alleged that a number of illegal immigrants from the Philippines and Indonesia, including infants, had died while in the process of being deported to their respective countries.

The minister said given that the deportation exercise involved hundreds of thousands of people, it was not fair to conclude that there must have been ill treatment just because someone had died.

Syed Hamid reiterated that in deporting the illegal immigrants, Malaysia was only exercising its right as a sovereign nation to ensure that the country was free from immigrants who came here without proper documentation, were jobless or choose to get involved in criminal activities.

"We have to take action because it has become a social burden to us. Some (are) involved in criminal activities, not to mention they may be exploited by unscrupulous employers," he said.

The minister wondered why the alleged plight of the illegal immigrants were highlighted now while nobody made any noise about the criminal actions previously committed by some of them.

Nevertheless, Syed Hamid said the bilateral relation between Malaysia and the countries concerned was too valuable for it to be diverted by the current situation.

On the reported protest outside the Malaysian embassy in Manila over the alleged poor treatment of the illegal immigrants, he said what was important was that people must realise that Malaysia's actions were done within the ambit of its legal system to tackle the problem of illegal immigrants in this country.

Syed Hamid said Kuala Lumpur had done much by accepting Filipinos to work in this country, enabling them to send money back home to help their families in line with Malaysia's "prosper-thy-neighbour" spirit.

He said the action by the group of protesters who reportedly torched pictures of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and burned the Jalur Gemilang did not reflect the good ties enjoyed by the two countries.

"If they have anything specific then they have to let us know. But whatever we do, we have not done it arbitrarily or outside the scope of our law," he said.

On whether Indonesian People's Consultative Assembly Speaker Amien Rais should apologise for criticising the whipping penalty imposed by the Malaysian government on illegal immigrants, he said relations between the two neighbouring countries should not be soured by certain incidents along

the way.

"Our relations should not be situational. We see our bilateral relations on a long-term basis based on what has been built by both sides so far," he said.

Tension, he added, would not solve any problem.

Syed Hamid commended the leaders of Indonesia for being rational in tackling the issue.

He said Malaysia was not out to victimise any foreign countries and the 12 million tourists who came here last year attested to Kuala Lumpur's visitor-friendly policy.

On a related matter, Syed Hamid said the government had not banned Malaysians from travelling to Indonesia due to the alleged anti-Malaysia feeling among certain Indonesians.

He said those who felt uncomfortable or worried about going to certain parts of the republic should refrain from proceeding with their travel plans.

In addition, he advised those who were going to Indonesia to take along the required documents to avoid problems with the authorities there.

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