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Mahathir-Acheh

M'SIA WILL NOT GRANT POLITICAL ASYLUM TO ACHEHNESE ILLEGALS, SAYS PM

KUCHING, Aug 28 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Malaysia will not grant political asylum to the Achehnese who fled to Malaysia from the Indonesian province.

He said that they would be regarded as illegal immigrants and action would be taken against them as Malaysia would against any other illegal immigrants.

"We don't grant political asylum to those fleeing Acheh...they will only remain as illegal immigrants and they will be placed under detention," he told reporters at a joint media conference with Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri here.

The leaders of the two neighbouring countries earlier held their annual consultations.

The Malaysian authorities rounded up 232 Achehnese attempting access to the premises of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Kuala Lumpur on Aug 19.

Several of them were reported to have intended to seek political asylum while the rest have fled Acheh in search of jobs.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda, when met later, welcomed Malaysia's stand.

"Malaysia as a sovereign nation has taken a stand that foreign nationals staying illegally in Malaysia will be deported to their countries of origin. In this context, Indonesia will also act likewise against the illegal immigrants," he said.

Asked whether any of those detained were members of the Free Acheh Movement (Gerakan Acheh Merdeka-GAM), Hassan said that the principal issue was whether or not they entered Malaysia illegally.

"As far as Malaysia is concerned, certainly whether they are GAM (members) or not, the issue is that if there are foreign nationals staying illegally in the country, they will be deported," he said.

Hassan said that whatever the circumstances, the presence of the Achehnese was "not because there is an integrated operations currently carried out in Acheh."

"As such, there is no correlation between the two issues," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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