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'Adequate laws to deal with torture of maids in Malaysia'

BERITA Harian took a strong view on claims of discrimination, abuse and torture of Indonesian maids in Malaysia.

Its editorial on Tuesday argued that if it was true that in January alone, 149 maids had sought refuge at the Indonesian embassy from cruel employers, firm action must be taken to address the matter.

The paper said Indonesia should be reassured that Malaysian laws are adequate to deal with errant employers, regardless of their nationalities. Many employers, it noted, had been punished for their inhumane action before this.

"Any form of abuse and torture against maids, if proven, will be severely dealt with as provided under the law," it said when commenting on the decision by the Indonesian Government to freeze the sending of maids to Malaysia and several other countries for two months following reports of abuse.

The landslide at Taman Hillview in Ampang last November which killed eight people hit the front page of Berita Harian again yesterday. It was on the findings of an investigation into the incident which flattened the home of former Armed Forces chief Tan Sri Ismail Omar. The report identified an abandoned project on top of the hill as the cause, concluding the hillside could not withstand the weight of the project.

The paper said the report was being studied by the Cabinet.

In a related story, the Taman Hillview Residents Action Committee called on the authorities to make public the report. Although the incident happened more than 100 days ago, the committee argued residents were still living in fear and anxiety as they were in the dark whether the area was safe or not.

Utusan Malaysia conducted a street poll on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's proposal that the Kedah administrative capital be shifted from Alor Star to Langkawi.

There was mixed reaction from the public, with many calling for a comprehensive study to be carried out. One of the suggestions was that government servants to be stationed in Langkawi be provided with housing like in Putrajaya.

An assistant systems analyst, Abdul Kadir Mahmood, disagreed with the idea, and listed transportation between the island and mainland as his main concern. The paper analysed the proposal in its editorial yesterday, saying the suitability of other state administrative capitals should also be considered.

It said in most cases, the capitals also functioned as the centre for trade, commerce, education, recreation, sports and a myriad of other activities, leading to congestion and space constraints.

The cities of Georgetown, Ipoh, Seremban, Malacca and Johor Baru were cited as examples by the paper.

"We are not calling for all state capitals to be relocated. Perhaps what is needed now is to move the administrative centre to a more suitable area."