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Preventing entry of illegals (HL)

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KUCHING, Thurs. - Malaysia and Indonesia have agreed on a host of strategies to curb the entry of Indonesian illegal immigrants to Malaysia, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Acknowledging the efforts taken by the Indonesian Government to prevent its nationals from entering Malaysia illegally, the Prime Minister said:

"They (the Indonesian authorities) have taken a lot of action which has reduced the problem, but it is not completely resolved."

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a joint Press conference with Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri at the Kuching Hilton after their annual consultation. (Picture on Page 2)

"We have discussed ways and means to make the control (of illegal immigrants) much more effective," Dr Mahathir said when asked whether he was satisfied with the action taken by the Indonesian Government to prevent their nationals from entering Malaysia illegally.

Malaysia unwillingly hosts more than two million illegal immigrants, 500,000 of whom are Indonesians.

He added that authorities of both countries would share intelligence to overcome the problem.

"We will determine where the illegals take off, where they land in Malaysia, what should be the legal points of entry and exit, and how do we repatriate them."

Megawati said Indonesia would prefer to appoint authorised agents to supply workers to Malaysia through legal means.

"This will make it easy for us to ensure that only the legal workers will enter Malaysia," she said.

However, officials say Malaysia is not in favour of the proposal. Dr Mahathir said Malaysia and Singapore also decided to strengthen co-operation to counter terrorist threats. Megawati reiterated her belief that Indonesia's initiative for an Asean Security Community would to a certain extent help in the fight against terrorism.

"Terrorism can occur anywhere, can be carried out by anyone and anywhere. No country can claim to be free from the threat of terrorism. The security community will provide the platform for a stronger co-operation against terrorism," she said.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia and Indonesia also agreed to take steps to intensify two-way trade and co-operate in the area of defence, intelligence, prevention of air pollution, and certifying pharmaceutical products from both countries.

On whether Malaysia would offer political asylum to Acehese separatists who entered the country illegally, Dr Mahathir said it would not.

"They will be treated like other illegal immigrants."

Earlier, Dr Mahathir and Megawati witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding between a Malaysian information technology company and Indonesian firm to develop a RM1.5 billion (US\$400 million) monorail project in Central Jakarta.

Kuala Lumpur-based MTtrans Holdings Sdn Bhd was represented by its chairman David Chiew while PT Indonesia Transit Central (PT ITC) by its chief executive officer Ruslan Diwirjo. Signing on behalf of the City Government of Jakarta was its Governor Sutiyoso.

In the joint-venture project, PT ITC will be the company to obtain the concession from Jakarta City government for the implementation of the 20km

Jakarta Monorail while MTrans Holdings will be the technology supplier.