

Malaysia blames UN for 'flood' of refugees
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Malaysia has accused the United Nations refugee agency of contributing to a "flood" of immigrants who are poorly cared for, according to a report today.

Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia had expressed concern "on a number of occasions" to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) over the growing numbers of immigrants given refugee status.

"What we are not happy about is the current state of affairs, the difficulty, the social and economic burden we face," he told the New Straits Times newspaper.

The UNHCR "should not be taking people except for those who really have a problem, and it should inform us. At present, it doesn't inform us," he added.

Malaysia is not a party to international refugee conventions, and illegal immigrants are often detained and later deported to their home country.

However, the UNHCR can assign refugee status to applicants and assist in resettling them in another country or in voluntary repatriation.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia was supposed to a place of transition, but that the number of refugees was "becoming a flood," with the UNCHR registering some 40,000.

"We have given humane treatment to these people who have come to this country illegally. It (the UNHCR) should get them to a third country. Otherwise, every illegal in this country will go to the UNHCR and ask to be certified as refugees," he said.

No comments from UNHCR

The minister said the UN agency was failing in its duty to take care of the refugees.

"UNHCR has to manage it properly ... You see (the refugees) on the road. Syndicates exploit them. Children who are fatherless, motherless are on our streets. They have become street children," he said.

UNHCR officials, when contacted, could not immediately comment on the accusations.

They followed a call last month from Malaysia's home minister for the UNHCR to set up its own camps to deal with burgeoning numbers of refugees from Myanmar, Indonesia's Aceh province, and the Philippines.

The criticism comes in the wake of plans announced by Malaysia last month Malaysia to arrest up to half a million illegal foreign workers amid fears of illegal immigrants committing crimes.